

# 5<sup>th</sup> Seminar on Land Reforms

Indian Institute of Public Administration  
West Bengal Branch  
In Collaboration with  
Directorate of Land Records & Surveys  
West Bengal

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at  
SIVANANDA HALL  
RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE  
CALCUTTA

PAPERS FOR USE IN THE SEMINAR

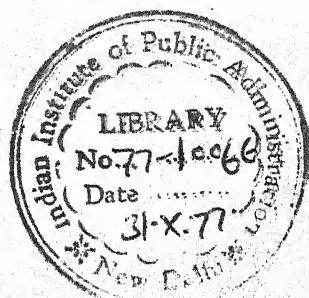
1. INAUGURAL ADDRESS : BY SHRI G. P. KHAN.
2. LAND RECORDS : BY SHRI B. K. SARKAR
3. LAND CEILINGS
4. PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS. : BY SHRI J.V.R.PRASAD RAO
5. "THE EFFECTS OF LAND REFORMS IN A VILLAGE IN THE SUNDARBANS"  
(SYNOPSIS OF THE PAPER : BY SHRI H. GHOSH  
PREPARED IN JANUARY 1972 )
6. GROWTH OF ECONOMIC FEUDALISM AND LAND REFORM TO COMBAT IT : BY SHRI P. K. DATTA
7. CARRYING IMPROVED AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY TO SMALL PERSONS : BY SHRI P. V. SHENOI.
8. PROBLEMS OF SHARE-CROPPERS IN WEST BENGAL : BY SHRI M.M.K. SAMANTA.

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## R E P O R T

### I

The Seminar was inaugurated by Shri G. P. Khan, Minister-in-Charge of Land Utilisation & Reforms and Land & Land Revenue Department of the Government of West Bengal who dealt with the great importance of land reforms in the context of the Twenty Point Programme. He elucidated the objectives of land reforms and the various measures being taken to reach the objectives of land reforms, and the success achieved so far as well as the difficulties encountered. The Minister concluded his inaugural speech in the expectation that the deliberations of the seminar would help towards a clearer understanding of the existing problems in implementing land reforms measures, and evoke ways of better implementation.

Shri B. R. Gupta, Chairman of the Indian Institute of Public Administration (West Bengal Regional Branch) introduced Shri R. K. Trivedi, Secretary, Department of Personnel, Government of India and requested him to address the seminar.

Shri Trivedi stressed the need for land reforms forming an organic part of an integrated programme of rural uplift. Implemented in isolation, these measures however revolutionary in themselves, may prove self-defeating in the long run. Despite the power of the rich farmers, the major hurdle of want of political will is now a thing of the past. But the unfortunate truth remains that the abolition of intermediaries did not signify the end of exploitation. The exploitation by the rural money-lenders, and sometimes extracted by the village level Govt. functionaries also became more accentuated. This was perhaps land reforms were equated with giving a burial to the vestiges of feudalism only in land tenure system. Had the psychological and economic reforms to ensure security from the coercion by petty village officials as well as provision

of easy institutional credit accompanied the imposition of ceiling laws, the revolution would have been complete. He also stated that one has to be more realistic about the role of the nationalised banks in meeting the credit needs of the beneficiaries in this context. The dimensions of the job are such as that we cannot expect the commercial banks to go beyond a Block or taluk level. The operation of the banks often distort the wage structure in the rural areas ; it would also be virtually impossible for them to cover all the small men in agriculture. The gap has to be therefore necessarily filled up by the co-operative sector which has to be given an effective role for the purpose. Admittedly, enveloping the entire rural India with viable service co-operatives is the answer. Linked with the question of bank finance is the problem of providing extension support. The Govt. extension workers in the C. D. Blocks are the only machinery available at present for this purpose. But the need for positive extension service has grown many-fold with the increasing participation of commercial banks and co-operatives in the development process, while the strength of the block level-staff who were originally conceived for a limited sphere of activity remained the same which is highly inadequate. Shri Trivedi wound up his thought-provoking speech with the suggestion of subsidised extension services to be attached to every credit institution with a view to catering to local demands and buttressing the land reforms measures making them more meaningful to the rural poor.

Swami Lokeswarandaji who spoke next further underlined the importance of having a cadre of dedicated extension workers easily accessible in the country-side. He pointed out that the existing Block machinery leaves much to be desired in that they often lack the sophistication called for by the magnitude of the task facing them. Swamiji mentioned the U. S. example where 'counselling services' in agriculture played pivotal role in stepping up production more than any other single factor.

Shri B. K. Sarkar's two papers on Land Records and Land Ceilings which he introduced together triggered a lively discussion touching not only the subjects introduced but also allied matters of equal importance.

Shri S. K. Ghosh wanted to know how reliable are the statistics on which the papers under discussion were based. In reply Shri B. K. Sarkar highlighted modus-operandi of the Settlement Department, which does not depend on sample surveys, but does plot to plot survey collecting information straight from the primary source. Shri Ghosh was joined by Shri P. V. Shenoi who doubted the wisdom in drawing conclusions from the data collected by functionaries whose objectivity and expertise is not often of requisite standard. But Shri Sarkar drew the attention of the house to the salient feature of the current cycle of survey and settlement operation viz.,, the qualitative improvement in the calibre of the field staff this time. Unlike in the earlier settlement operations where an amin was entrusted with field survey and field-recording ( i.e. Khasra recording) in a halka unit, there is now a team of directly-recruited functionaries piloted by a Gazetted Officer, Kanungo / Subordinate Land Revenue Service, Grade I / . These Kanungos are invariably young men from the universities with good academic record and imbued with idealism. The experience in the last one year has fully vindicated the trust Government have reposed in them in that they rose upto the occasion with missionary spirit to take up a challenging task. Further, there is a three-tier system of supervision in the field with the Circle Officers, the Charge Officers and the Settlement Officer, each in turn checking and verifying a certain percentage of the work of the lowest rung endowing the final output with great deal of accuracy. The scope for human error has been considerably reduced. He cited the recording of bargadars this time, which registered a three-fold rise over the previous figures as an example. While giving this example he referred only to those who are coming forward to get

their names recorded as bargadars during the plot-to-plot investigation during khasra enquiry and Khanapuri-Bujharat stage of record preparation. There are many bargadars who still feel shy to get their names recorded as such. Suppression of the interest of bargadars takes place on a sizeable scale when an attempt is made either in course of settlement operation or by any special drive to record bargadars' name. This led to a further question whether it is possible to get an idea about the number of bargadars and the area under barga cultivation. In reply Shri Sarkar stated that all available statistics regarding the total number of bargadars are under-estimate. The surveys that are relevant in this regard are : -

1) Floud Commission Report ( 1940 ) , 1941 Census, Ishque's Report ( 1944-45 ) , 1951 Census and the Revisional Settlement Operation ( 1955-58 ). According to 1951 Census the number of bargadars was 7,47,845 whereas the number ~~as~~ as found in Revisional Settlement Operation was 7,71,127. The area under cultivation which was covered by the 1951 Census was about 76 lakh acres against about 117 lakh acres which was then the total area under cultivation ( according to the figures of the Agriculture Department ). According to the said Census compilation, 21.66 lakh acres out of the 76 lakh acres covered by the Census was under barga cultivation. If it is assumed that the same pattern persists even now the present acreage under Barga cultivation can be estimated as 38 lakh acres, which is more than 25% of the total cultivated area.

Dr. Ajit Narayan Bose of the State Planning Board while appreciating the studies made in recording of bargadars wondered how far the Settlement Department had succeeded in eliminating bogus persons who very often masquerade as bargadars. He had come across landlords and Bhadralok class in the garb of bargadars to defeat the aims of legislation and deprive the genuine ones.

Shri Sarkar once again pin-pointed attention on the faithful nature of the enquiries that precede recording of bargadars.

Taking Aman as the principal crop, the Halka staff as a rule make plot-to-plot enquiries, besides collecting local intelligence prior to identifying and recording a bargadar. Shri S. Chakraborty of State Planning Board, had a useful suggestion in this regard. He stated that mere recording the name of a bargadar would hardly help unless his specific possession is demarcated in the village cadastral map in addition to featuring the same in the land records with relevant details like size of holding, cropping pattern etc. The whole objective of the exercise must leave no room for confusion or manipulation by landed gentry in the village records pertaining to the rights of the bargadars. Apart from being safe guarantees for bank loans, such complete records would be his only insurance against exploitation. Shri Sarkar replied that the suggestion was already in the implementation stage.

Discussions at this point turned to the issue of having a faithful set of records covering not only bargadars, but the entire gamut of economic activities associated with land holdings. Shri M. G. Kutty and Shri S. K. Ghose mentioned that there was a big gap between the records prepared at a point of time and the realities on the field, on a subsequent date. And this gap could be bridged, they stressed, only through means of a grass-root level organisation like that of Patwari system where day-to-day changes in land utilisation and land ownership and incidence of possession could be incorporated into the records simultaneously in an automatic and continuous process. Shri M. G. Kutty observed that it is high time that we replace what he called 'the snap-shot picture records' with one of enduring value like that obtaining in many other states by providing for constant mutation. It was widely agreed that by the time the records currently under preparation at huge costs to the exchequer are finally published they may have outlived their utility, specially for planning and administration. Past-tensed and inaccurate, these records would seldom be taken as the major premise-which they should ordinarily be - for underpinning any serious

socio-economic planning. For example, the cropping pattern, which is subject to annual if not seasonal changes would be a far cry any day from what is reflected in out-dated records. It was suggested by Shri Kutty that the village level land revenue officer should be a permanent functionary of adequate status, and that the cost of such an establishment will be compensated by benefits to planning and administration.

Dr. Ranjit Lahiri of Indian Statistical Institute suggested an answer to this problem in computerising the process, the advantages of which were too obvious to need to be emphasized in detail. Shri B. K. Sarkar, however, pointed out that introduction of sophisticated data processing techniques will not solve the ~~problem~~ problem of primary data. The collection of primary data at the village level would nevertheless be largely through the village level functionary and has to be normally done.

Shri Dipak Ghose stated that the extermination of zamindari system had not ipso facto put an end to all its evils. As a matter of fact, its ghost is still stalking the procedure of record preparation and maintenance. The system has to be changed lock, stock and barrel. Shri S. K. Mukerjei intervened in the discussion to say that Board was fully alive to shortcomings of the practice in vogue. The present crash drive for disposal of mutation petitions, according to ~~him~~ him was an experimental step to meet the present situation. A scheme is already in the ambit for switching over to raiyatwari system, which by common consent, is more rational and ideally suited to tackle the existing bottlenecks. Shri B. K. Sarkar wound up the discussions on his papers by once again emphasizing the crying need for institutional changes as a precursor to thorough implementation of land reforms which are of seminal significance in the present day socio-economic thinking.

Discussion on the paper read by Shri J.V.R. Prasada Rao, was held in the afternoon session. Dr. A. N. Bose initiated the discussions. He stated that there were certain basic presumptions that needed to be clarified. Firstly every agricultural labour could not be given some land. Secondly the concept of a viable holding was not a static one but in the present conditions 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres could be considered a viable holding. Thirdly mere demand for increase in wage rate had perhaps no significance unless employment was assured round the year and not of sporadic nature as is seen now. Wage rate could only be of real significance with reference to the number of working days in the year. Even at the present actual low wage rate assured employment round the year would be a distinct achievement towards the improvement of the lot of agricultural labourers. Fourthly, the present land tenure system which keeps large number of men landless or without employment has to be examined against the total agricultural product of the state. On an average the present productivity in West Bengal is one thousand Kgs. of rice per worker per year. If there are four people in the family of each worker the total output will be not sufficient for them alone. Hence, there can be no agricultural surplus to support the non-agriculture sector. The marketable surplus depends on the present inequitable distribution of land. Increasing landlessness therefore generates increasing surplus that is to say surplus available for consumption of the individual worker and city dwellers. Under the present land tenure system social development is obstructed. At present there is a 25 to 50% of the crop return guaranteed to the land owner. The land owner will be persuaded to invest in modernisation only if the return is higher, which means that the price of crops must remain high. And finally, with increased production after modernisation the price will come down, thus killing initiative. It is only the marginal and small farmers who can break this vicious circle. They must be supported by industry which should produce mainly for the agriculture sector. Finally he concluded that re-structuring of the industrial power and credit base is necessary.

Shri R. K. Lahiri said that actual field studies showed that the wages of agricultural labourers do not increase correspondingly with the green revolution.

Shri S. Chakrabarti, Chairman of the Seminar amplified the above point by saying that although the rise in wage rate is higher in Kerala, in absolute figures wages are highest in the Punjab. Many small farmers of Punjab have found it more profitable to sell the land to the big farmers and work as agricultural labourers. There is of course the need for a peasants' organisation and increased productivity. Land Reforms must have institutional and political support since it is the most important weapon to change the economic structure.

Next paper was read by Shri Hirak Ghosh, who did not agree that the Naxalbari movement originated from maldistribution of land. He stated that a study had shown that land hunger was not at the root of wide spread lawlessness and violence in 1967. The percentage of vesting was quite high in Naxalbari area. There was no pressure on land ; and most of the leaders were big jotedars. In his opinion the causes lay elsewhere. The highly progressive legislation regarding the wages of Agricultural labourers enacted by the Labour Department created some anomalies in the villages. The principle of licencing out of vested land also gave scope for manipulation. The L.R.A. Committee should not be amenable to the influence of the jotedars, and they should give lands to people according to directives issued by the Government, in this regard.

Shri S. K. Mukerjei said that perhaps it would not be wise to hasten the pace of land reforms by only imposition from above. Shri A. R. Saha, stated that Land Reforms to be effective must be followed by development of Co-operatives, improvement of marketing facilities and increasing availability of inputs such as credit. A joint ~~effort~~ effort of the Agriculture and Land Reforms Departments of the Government should be made.

Shri P. K. Datta then read his paper. Shri S. Chakraborty, Chairman of the Seminar opened the discussion with a compliment that it was well written paper. His view was that distribution of land below one hectre was merely distributing poverty. To improve the lot of the marginal farmers simultaneous activities like animal husbandry, pisciculture etc. are necessary. He further said that the concept of rural Banks may not serve useful purpose unless they reach the small farmers in remote areas. The better solution would be to make credit available through the development of Co-operatives.

Shri P. V. Shenoi then read his paper. He explained the new type of co-operatives started for giving credit to the marginal farmers. The Board of Directors of such co-operatives should have two third of its members drawn from small farmers and bargadars and one third from bigger farmers with a manager appointed by the Bank.

Shri R. K. Prasannan said that credit did not merely mean distributing money but offering a package of services and expert advice to the creditors and for that purpose steps should be taken to improve the quality and capability of co-operative Bank Managers.

Shri M. M. K. Sardana, read his paper on bargadars. There was a general agreement with his views.

The discussion ended with a vote of thanks by the Seminar Director.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

SHRI G. P. KHAN

Dear friends,

I welcome you to this important seminar on Land Reforms. I thank the Indian Institute of Public Administration ( West Bengal Regional Branch ) for arranging this seminar. My respectful thanks to Swami Lokeswarananda, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark for actively associating himself with this venture of I.I.P.A. and providing a fitting venue for the seminar discussion. I am very glad indeed that the Directorate of Land Records and Surveys is one of the collaborators in this important seminar.

Land Reforms, the topic of this seminar, is the most burning issue of the day in this country. The reason why so much importance is being given to this subject not only in this country but also in most developing countries is not far to seek. Much of human history is the history of relationship of man to land and changes of this relationship through ages. Man depends on the land for his very existence. A man's sense of economic well-being, nay, his very outlook of life is influenced by the land he holds and the capacity with which he holds, that is to say, his rights and obligations in relation to his piece of land. There is nothing like having a space on the earth, however small it may be, that one can call his own to provide the tiller of the soil and his family with a sense of security and dignity.

It is indeed a happy sign that every one who has the interest of his country at heart is conscious of the importance of land reforms. Land Reform is :

"an integrated set of measures designed to eliminate obstacles to economic and social development arising out of defects in the agrarian structure".

This is the definition used in the FIFTH REPORT OF THE F.A.O. in 1969 . This covers the entire gamut of agrarian society, and the objective set forth is the restructuring of the agrarian society in all aspects of development. Eminent Economist, Political thinkers, Social Philosophers and Administrators not only of this country but of all countries - the developing and the developed - are now giving attention to the problems of land reforms all over the world. In India 70 per cent of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. In the case of the State of West Bengal this percentage is still higher ; it is more than 75 per cent. Out of this about 40 to 50 per cent are the poorest sections consisting of majority of scheduled castes and tribes and muslims who are below the poverty line. The primary purpose of economic growth should be to ensure the improvement of the conditions for these groups. A growth process that benefits only the wealthiest minority and maintains or even increases the disparities between classes of population is not development.

In 1951, seventyfive per cent of the population in West Bengal depended on agriculture for their livelihood. The position was the same in 1961. No change was registered in 1971.

During the decade 1961-71 the total male workers in West Bengal increased by 14 lakh ( from one crore and forty thousand to one crore fourteen lakh and forty-four thousand ) , the number of male raiyats has remained more or less the same, but the number of male agricultural labourers was doubled ( from 14 lakh 46 thousand and 761 to 28 lakh 60 thousand and 629 ) . At one time it was thought, by investment in industries it would be possible to divert people from agriculture to industry and services dependent on industries. A lot was invested in industries. But it has not helped in reducing the dependence of the people on agriculture. Achievements in the sector of industry have not added much to the welfare of seventy per cent of the population. All schemes of improvement of the lot of the people will be of little consequence unless they take into their orbit the lot of the agricultural labourers and poor share-croppers who depend on agriculture for their bare living. History shows that behind the most political and social upheavals in any country lay the unendurable condition of the poor masses, the discontent of the rural masses.

During the national freedom movement expectations were raised among the crores of peasants and agricultural labourers that the inequitable and feudal agrarian society would be restructured on the lines of social justice, growth and dignity of labour. The restructuring was to be done through land reforms. How far could we do that in this State ? We have covered a period of two decades of land reforms in this State. All classes of intermediaries were abolished. The raiyats were brought directly under the State and made the owners of the land they hold. Provisions were made in land reforms laws for ceiling on holdings of rural land. The ceiling has been lowered further in 1972.

Concept of family unit was brought in ceiling-provisions with the expectation that this would plug the loop-holes of benami transfer of land by the head of the family to other members of the same family and bring more surplus land in the hands of the Government for distribution among the poor peasants.

Implementation of ceiling provisions till now has brought a surplus vested agricultural land of more than eight lakh acres in the hands of the State. About one lakh and a half acres more would have come to the State had the area not been involved in court injunctions. The State have by now distributed about six lakh acres among more than eight lakh beneficiaries for agricultural purposes. Over and above this, about 2 lakh and 74 thousand homeless and landless families, have been provided with lands for homestead purposes. If there is any impression in any quarter that nothing has been done in this State all these years, it should be dispelled by now especially after the launching of a special drive by the Chief Minister in pursuance of the Twenty Point Economic Programme announced by the Prime Minister. Top-most priority is assigned to the task to distribution of ceiling-sprplus vested land for agricultural purposes and for homestead purposes.

But this limited success hardly gives us any scope of complacence. We are yet to create an equitable system for the poor bargadars. We are yet to set up a system for taking care of the poor new allottees on ceiling surplus lands. They need credit, they need input. It is a fact that these small allottees belonging to the lower strata of the society are upto now completely dependent on the big landlord and village money-lender. We have yet to enable the bargadars and landless agricultural labourers to peacefully enjoy the benefits of the statutory safeguards guaranteed to them.

Soon after my assumption of the office as Minister I found that the record-of-rights were out of date in this State by about seventeen years. The existence of a set of correct and up-to-date record-of-rights is a pre-requisite for any land reforms measure. Due attention was paid to this item of work. The scheme of preparation of an up-to-date set of record-of-rights throughout the State was taken up as a Plan-Scheme for which we have got Rs.22 crores from the Centre. This massive scheme started in full swing from April, 1974 and is scheduled to be completed by the end of the Fifth Five Year Plan period. While going through the exercise of Revisional Settlement Operation particular attention is being given to the job of recording the names of bargadars. In one field season more than 8,000 mouzas have been completed in primary record preparation. The number of recorded bargadars in those mouzas in the last settlement operation of mid fifties was about 64,000. As against this the number of bargadars recorded in those mouzas during the current operation is more than 1,75,000. The situation has improved in the rural areas to enable bargadars to come forward to get their names recorded as such. But I sincerely feel that simply bringing the bargadars on record would not help in improving their lot unless positive action is taken for distribution of the credits and inputs to them. The distribution of credit and inputs has to be definitely in favour of these poor classes of people. This requires a change in the attitude in the administration as well as in the political out-look.

To sum up, the objective of land reforms is firstly to see that all tillers of the soil get a piece of land which they can call their own and secondly the bargadars are

are assured of rights conferred on them by the Govt. as expressed through enactment of laws, and thirdly to provide people with easy credit facilities so that they can free themselves from the economic bondage. All these are to be done simultaneously as a time-bound programme. More important is that the people who are to benefit from the land reforms programme should be organised and associated with the Land Reforms Committees at the base so as to exert adequate pressure from below. This is very necessary for proper implementation of the land reforms measures.

This seminar will, therefore, be for frank discussion on these basic questions of land reforms. I would request the learned participants of this seminar to address themselves to the practical questions concerning land reforms and to find out practical solutions to those questions. After all, as I have stated in the very beginning, land reform is a subject which covers all the aspects - economic, social and political - for improving the lot of the poorest sections of the agrarian society who were perpetually exploited. In other words, land reform is to reshape the agrarian structure on egalitarian lines to enable the poor and exploited lowest strata of the society to enjoy the fruits of real independence. Your presence here in this seminar would be a benefit to all of us now engaged in tackling the problems of land reform.

It is a pleasure to inaugurate this seminar and I wish that the collective wisdom and experience of the economists, the sociologists and the administrators will enable us to assess the problem in its totality and also to take appropriate follow up action.

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LAND RECORDS

B. K. SARKAR

Land record is the record of rights and obligations pertaining to land. The basic necessity in the preparation and working of any dependable land record lies in the fact that the parcels of land to which entries relate are defined in order to enable anyone to locate on the ground the parcels of land readily and certainly at any point of time. There are two aspects to be taken care of in any system of land recording.

These are :

- i) technical i.e. preparation of cadastral plans or maps either village-wise or property-holding wise after surveying the area ; and
- ii) administrative i.e. recording of necessary details in a documentary form having reference to the cadastral maps so far as the configuration and location of the field are concerned. The administrative aspect determines the objectives for land record. It may be used for juridical purposes, for fiscal purposes or for any economic or developmental objectives to serve as a data bank regarding land use. This explains evolution of land records through the ages.

2. Land records in this State means and includes, what is known in common parlance as, KHATIANS and a cadastral map of the area to which the khatians relate. The Khatian is a document in which the following particulars are posted :

- i) The nature of the tenancy
- ii) Name of the persons who own the tenancy right in question, and the shares of each co-sharer subsisting in the tenancy if the number of owners is more than one.
- iii) Name of the person who holds the superior landlord's right.
- iv) The amount of rent, cess and other dues which are payable by the owners of the tenancy to the superior landlords.

- v) Reference regarding subordinate tenancy rights.
- vi) The serial numbers of parcels of land (commonly known as plot numbers) as given in the cadastral map included in the tenancy.
- vii) Incidence and type of possession.
- viii) The total area of lands of the tenancy.

It will be seen that a khatian is, therefore, incomplete without a corresponding map in which the plots have been drawn. For this purpose maps are prepared for each mouza in which every separate plot of land is clearly drawn and is given a specific number.

### 3. METHOD OF PREPARATION OF MAP :

Cadastral maps are prepared in a number of stages. The general name of this process is known as Kistwar and it starts from that is known as Traverse Survey. Traverse Survey means fixing of some points on the ground after determination of the position of these points through astronomical observations so that the position of the points can be clearly determined on the earth surface. These points when joined give rise to an irregular geometrical figure which is then divided into quadrilaterals. Straight lines known as chain lines are drawn from point to point in the quadrilaterals and all features of actual plots on the right or the left of the straight lines and of the plots which are cut by the chains lines are measured and plotted on the map which when joined show the detailed configuration of the plots in the field. Plots are then given serial numbers in an orderly manner for identification and references.

### 4.1. PREPARATION OF KHATIANS :

Khatians also are prepared in a number of stages which are known as Khasra enquiry, Khanapuri, Bujharat, Attestation, Objection and Final publication. To start with, the particulars

of a plot such as the standing crop, name of the owner, etc., are recorded in a sheet of paper known as Khasra. Simultaneously all the particulars mentioned at para 2 above are put on the khatian form and this process is known as Khanapuri. The khatians so prepared is again subjected to further check in the field by examining the interested persons. This process is known as Bujharat. The records so prepared are then distributed to the persons concerned and these records are then processed through 'Attestation' where the Attestation Officer who sits in a centralised office for hearing the parties, puts his signature and stamp on the khatian in token of attestation. The attested khatian is then put into draft publication inviting objections. Objections petitions received are then heard and the records are corrected again on the basis of the orders passed. After this the khatians receive the final shape and are finally published and printed.

4.2. The above description of preparation of maps and khatians is the classical method that was adopted in the original settlement work in this State. For the revisional Settlement Operation that was taken up in 1953 and which has been taken up again last year the process is not so elaborate. The previous maps are checked and further patch survey is done only if the changes in configuration indicate the necessity of such a course. For the preparation of khatians in the current cycle of revisional settlement operations Khanapuri and Bujharat work are taken up simultaneously.

4.3. It is also clear that the records which will be prepared in the present operation will not conform to the description given at ~~the~~ commencement of this note. This is particularly due to the fact that after implementing the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953 all the intermediary interests have been abolished and the present-day raiyats are directly under the Government and they are not allowed to have any subordinate interests either. Inclusion of several co-sharers in the same

khatian is also a matter of past and now each khatian will record the name of only one person as tenant. This tenant is directly under the Government and he has no subordinate tenant of his own. The names of bargadars of any other person in possession of any plot will, of course, be shown.

5. HISTORY OF PREPARATION OF LAND RECORDS  
AND THE NECESSITY OF DOING SO :

Having got the Dewani of Bengal along with some other provinces in 1775, the East India Company tried to retain the Mughal system of appropriating a certain portion of the produce of land through local agents. With this end in view they tried yearly and quinquennial settlements of land revenue. Meanwhile, a great famine played a devastating role in Bengal and it was soon realised that something permanent should be done to reorganise the agrarian sector, about  $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of which was obliterated by the great famine. The revenue collection also fell short of the requirement of the Company. The Committee of Revenue originally set up by the Supreme Council in 1772 was reorganised in 1781. In June, 1786 the Committee of Revenue was reconstituted under the designation of the Board of Revenue which continues to this date. The Committee of Revenue was entrusted with the job of collecting data and of examining the defects of the existing system of revenue administration. Meanwhile, Pitt's India Act, 1784 ordered an enquiry into the complaints of land holders who were dispossessed of their landed properties due to arrear of revenue etc. and issued a directive to the Company to frame rules by which their respective tributes, rents and services should be in future rendered and paid. While the East India Company was busy in finding a solution to the burning problem of land revenue administration, Major James Rennell, the father of Indian Geography started a survey of a vast area of this State and published the maps in 1780 and 1781. Rennell survey was chiefly historical and in the absence of any other survey these maps were used. These maps were considered in several decisions

in the High courts and Privy Council cases. Revenue enquiries were made from 1786 to 1789 and a decennial settlement was made in 1789 with the landholders. This settlement was made permanent under the Permanent Settlement Regulations, 1793. The system thus introduced remained the major frame work of land revenue administration in Bengal till 1953. Under the permanent settlement a class of persons known as proprietors was created and the Government fixed revenue payable by them in perpetuity. The relation of the proprietors with their tenants and the relation between subordinate tenant of the proprietors with their own subordinate tenants in chain were not set in the Regulation. Soon after the Permanent Settlement the number of tiers in between the raiyats and the proprietors started increasing. The number of these intermediary tiers rose to 50. The actual cultivators lost contact with the proprietors due to these intermediary tiers. This new development in the agrarian sector gave rise to another serious problem - the problem arising out of clash of interest between the different tiers of intermediaries and raiyats. This new development led the Government to enact the Regulation of 1822. These regulations could provide only some fringe relief to the poorer class of tenants. Uncertainty as to the legal possession of tenants and uncertainty in the identification of the parcels of land were felt more and more acute. These were due to absence of authoritative plot to plot or cadastral survey and record of rights. The dangers of the situation and the urgency of the remedial legislation led to the taking of effective step in 1859. The main provisions of the Rent Act of 1859 (Act X of 1859) were to safe guard the rights of the raiyats among others. But those also were not adequate. As a result the Rent Law Commission was appointed in 1879 to prepare a digest of existing laws and to draw up a comprehensive bill. The Bill ultimately ripened into Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. This Act empowered the Government to make cadastral survey with preparation of village or mouza maps containing the exact

position of each plot of land in the scale of 16" to a mile, and compile a record of right in land. It provides for appointment of Settlement Officers who are also Superintendents of Survey. This time the survey and record of rights went beyond the requirements for fiscal purposes only and recorded all details about various interests in land, rent, classification of plot of land, mode of its use, possession, types of crop grown, system of irrigation, if any available and many other important details. A full scale preparation of maps and of khatians was undertaken in 1888 and the process ended in 1940. It took nearly half a century to cover the entire area of the then Bengal Presidency. Every person interested in land therefore had a printed document known as khatian which showed the nature and extent of its interest in his plot of lands.

#### 6.1. THE PRESENT UNDERTAKINGS :

At the present moment Directorate of Land Records and Surveys is engaged in preparation of R.O.Rs in almost the entire area of West Bengal because the records prepared in 1954 have become out of date. There is also the fact that the new economic and social outlook now makes it imperative that it is not enough to ensure the interests of raiyats but also of the share-croppers who had always been at the mercy of the owners of the land and possibly the most exploited class of the people in the country. For various reasons the names of actual bargadars were not put on record in the Revisional Settlement Operation under the W.<sup>B</sup>.E.A. Act. One of the principal purposes of the present operation is, therefore, to ensure that the names of all actual share-croppers are posted on the records of rights so that they can also reap the benefits of the increased and liberal rights given to them under the new legislations.

6.2. The other important purpose of the new operation is to implement the new ceiling provisions under the West Bengal Land Reforms Act. It has been found that due to various reasons many persons succeeded in escaping the ceiling provisions under the W.B.E.A. Act and the new provisions which take all the holdings of the members of a family as one unit are meant to bring the previous escapees to book. So far the performance regarding the recording of bargadar has been quite satisfactory. It has been found that in the areas where Khanapuri-Bujharat work have been completed the number of bargadars recorded is more than three times the corresponding figure of the last operation. It is however, felt that even now many share-croppers are being prevented from recording their names by their landlords because they feel that once the names of bargadars are recorded it will be difficult to evict them or to deny them their rightful shares.

6.3. It is, therefore, the duty of every citizen to help the Revenue Officers in preparing the R.O.Rs correctly and in recording the names of all actual share-croppers. Without the support of public opinion the bargadars cannot be expected to withstand the pressure of their landlords and to come forward to have their names recorded. Similarly the force of public opinion is also necessary for helping the Revenue Officers in performing their own duties without fear and favour.

7. FUTURE MAINTENANCE OF LAND RECORDS :

It is clear from what has been stated above that the khatians show the position as on a certain date. Changes naturally occur in the ownership and in other matters with the passage of time and there should therefore, be some method of keeping the records up-to-date if they are to be

of any use. The records prepared under the W.B.E.A. Act being out of date by nearly 20 years it has become now necessary to take up a whole sale revision of records throughout the State. The project is costly and time consuming. All the plot in the State numbering more than 5 crores have to be visited by a party of workers and their work has also to be supervised and inspected. The various stages mentioned above also require time and the present operation is scheduled to run for five years for final publication of all the R.O.Rs of the State. The land records now are of a simple nature there being only one common landlord namely, the Government and no subordinate tenancy of the raiyats. This position substantially conforms to the land revenue system in many other States and is generally known as 'Raiyatwari System'. In those States wholesale survey and settlement is not undertaken but whenever there is any change in ownership the village level revenue official, the Patwari scores through the name of the previous owner and puts in the name of the new owner. If two adjacent plots merge the intervening line is simply rubbed out and if a plot is divided into more than one portion because of partition the demarcating lines are drawn on the map. Thus the records are kept up-to-date with little effort and cost in terms of money. The W.B.L.R. Act also provides for such continuous maintenance of records under section 50 of the Act. It is because this business was not attended to since the last settlement operation that this costly project of whole sale revision of records had to be launched. In future therefore, the records will have to be maintained and kept up-to-date under section 50 and there will be no necessity of a revisional settlement project like the one under progress. In certain parts where the changes in the course of river or large scale urbanisation have taken place it will be necessary to take up survey for these areas. Survey therefore in future will be localised.

L A N D C E I L I N G S.

B. K. SARKAR.

Ceilings in respect of areas held by a person was a concept introduced in the W.B.E.A. Act, 1953. This Act had in view two distinct measures of land reforms. These are : -

- (i) Abolition of all rent-receiving interests then in existence in between the State and last rent paying individual, and
- (ii) Fixing of ceilings prescribing the maximum quantity of different classes of land retainable by an individual and the acquisition of the surplus by paying compensation according to law.

The idea was to take possession of surplus lands above the ceiling and to distribute the same to the landless. This combined ideas of land reforms, social justice and improvement in agricultural production as it tended to decrease the number of landless agricultural labour replacing them by owner-cultivators.

The ceilings prescribed under the W.B.E.A. Act, if simply stated, are as follows : -

- (a) Agricultural ... ... 25 acres.
- (b) Non-agricultural ... ... 20 "
- (c) Forests ... ... Nil.
- (d) Tank-Fisheries ... ... No limit.
- (e) Trusts and endowments of exclusively religious and charitable in nature ... No limit.
- (f) Tea Gardens and Mills & Factories. ... Such areas as are necessary and fixed as such by the Govt.

The imposition of ceiling laws was preceded by a wholesale Settlement Operation which was intended to show the actual position of land holding on the date of vesting prescribed under the Act. Successful implementation of the ceiling provisions, therefore, depend on a correct preparation of the R.O.Rs. Most unfortunately however, this very process of preparation of R.O.Rs was taken advantage of by the interested persons who through various methods succeeded in getting the records prepared in such a manner that only a fraction of the lands that ought to have vested, were actually available as surplus on the basis of the R.O.Rs. One of the methods adopted was to transfer lands to various persons including the members of ones own family. Thus it so happened that there were instances of persons of the same family holding lands upto the prescribed ceiling. Some times in 1967 a special drive was launched to locate all such lands which have escaped vesting. The drive was a success and would have been of the nature of spectacular success but for the large number of Civil Suits and High Court cases instituted by the parties which stalled the progress of the work and in many instances reversed the process of vesting. Uptil now the following areas have actually vested under the W. B.E.A. Act :-

UPTO SEPTEMBER, 1975

(a)	Agricultural lands	...	9,58,862	acres.	
(b)	Non-Agri. lands	...	5,26,073	"	
(c)	Forest	...	...	9,63,647	"
(d)	Others.	...	...	20,555	"

TOTAL : 24,69,137 acres.

A new set of ceiling provisions came into force under the W. B. L. R. Act, 1975. The principal change was that instead of taking an individual as an unit for holding the prescribed ceiling, the family was taken to be the unit and the entire areas held by the family came under the ceiling provisions. The other changes are about the ceilings regarding Orchards and Trusts and Endowments. It may be noted that the W.B.L.R. Act is concerned only with agricultural lands and as such Tank-Fisheries, Tea Gardens, Mills and Factories do not come under its scope.

The ceiling under the W. B. L. R. Act, stated briefly, is as follows :-

(1) Family consisting of an adult unmarried person :

2.50 hectares or 6-10 acres of irrigated lands,

OR

3.50 hectares or 8.65 acres of unirrigated lands.

(2) Family consisting of not more than 5 members :

5 hectares or 12.36 acres of irrigated lands ,

OR

7 hectares or 17.30 acres of unirrigated lands .

(3) Allowance for every additional member in excess of 5 ( upto 4 additional members ) :

0.50 hectares or 1.24 acres of irrigated lands ,

OR

0.70 hectares or 1.73 acres of non-irrigated lands.

XXXXXMaximum

(4) Maximum area retainable by a family irrespective of size ( 9 members and above ) :

7 hectares or 17.30 acres of irrigated lands,

OR

9.00 hectares or 24.22 acres of non-irrigated lands.

(5) The lands held by a Private trust or endowments will be deemed to be owned by beneficiaries for the purpose of ceiling provisions. In regard to public institutions or public trusts the maximum area allowed to be held is -

7 hectares or 17.30 acres in irrigated lands

OR

9.00 hectares or 24.22 acres of non-irrigated lands.

(6) There is no ceiling in respect of lands held in the hilly portions of the Darjeeling district. This special privilege for the hilly areas was also allowed under the W. B.E.A. Act.

The work of imposition of ceiling under the W.B.L.R. Act has just commenced and upto now 42790 acres of agricultural lands have vested.

The ceiling provisions had come in for a good deal of criticism not only from the interested parties who had a natural reason to object to this provision because of the personal loss that was effected to them , but also from many persons who objected to this on the grounds of theory of rural economics and agricultural improvement. It was argued that what the Government was doing would only increase the number of poor people and the Government had embarked on a

project of distribution of poverty and not for distribution of wealth. It was also argued that for effecting agricultural improvement and agricultural output it was necessary to have more farms of optimum size rather than numerous fragmented holdings which cannot be expected to yield a good crop. Further it was argued that the persons to whom the lands were distributed would not have the means to put the areas under cultivation. It was also argued that while there was no ceiling in the matter of holding wealth of other types such as urban property and capital whether fluid in the shape of cash or gold and other valuables, there was no reason to singleout land for an imposition of a ceiling on holding.

I feel, it is worthwhile to quote below Wold Ladojinsky wrote on this issue :

" The main argument against the ceiling rests on the anticipated increase in the number of small, uneconomic and inefficient holdings and the presumed ultimate decline in agricultural production. These fears are probably exaggerated mainly because most of the cultivated land of India is not in single blocks but in pieces scattered all over the lot. Perhaps more often than not a tenant or a share-cropper recipient of a "surplus" plot of land is likely to cultivate the same land rather than add another holding. The established pattern of cultivation undergoes little change ; the vital change occurs only with the change in the ~~xxx~~ title to the land. The real contention, however, is that small holdings are less productive than bigger ones. The successful productivity results of the small size farming in Japan and Taiwan following the implementation of the most drastic of ceilings

tend to be discounted by opponents of such measures on the ground that these countries are "different", not comparable with India. In the circumstances, the Farm Management Studies in India, beginning some 15 years ago, are a surer guide for the purpose of this discussion. Their results can be summarised by saying that the gross output per acre is higher on the small farms and that productivity per acre decreases with size of holding. This is explained on the ground of the almost total dependence of the small farm on "family labour" compared with the cost of "wage labour", a controlling factor on large farms. If note is also taken of the old adage that the psychological factor of ownership "turns sand into gold", the validity of the conclusion cannot be disregarded.

This notwithstanding, the farmer with an acre or two can be made viable only if he, too, is supported by a network of governmental and other institutions disseminating technical knowledge and feeding the economics of scale with credit, other essential inputs, price supports and marketing facilities. In other words, this presupposes a deliberate shift of a share of state investments in the direction of those who need them most. In that event, the argument that the new owners would find themselves without adequate capital to operate their farms would lose much of its force. If, on the other hand, they were to be faced with nothing more than the ceiling land, even a generous allocation of such land cannot be looked upon as the panacea it is supposed to be. They might wind up with no land through the familiar cycle of borrowing at usurious rates, mortgage and foreclosure".

What was forgotten is that a country's wealth cannot be simply measured by the total national income nor by a simple average of national income. Two persons - one having a monthly income of 5000/- rupees and the other having no income at all would give the average income of two persons at Rs.2500/- per month. It is only by improving the lot of the largest number of men that a country's real national wealth can be increased. A small number of big farms owned by a few persons who use Tractors and other modern gadgets and fetching therefore, a spectacular output while keeping a very large number of men as landless labourers or men without any occupation, is simply no satisfactory substitute for a very large number of owner-cultivators even though the total output of the latter may be much less.

So long therefore, there is no industrial growth capable of absorbing the vast mass of rural people who have no occupation or skill other than agricultural, it is necessary that they should have as far as possible small plots of lands which they can call their own and where they can work with dignity may be without affluence.

As regards the singling out land for imposition of ceiling it may be remembered that land is the gift of nature and justice demands that all human beings should have equal rights to this source of income just as to the air one breaths and the suns rays one enjoys.

The success of the ceiling operation lies in seeking that the surplus areas are distributed to the correct people namely, - to the land less people who will cultivate the lands themselves. Most unfortunately there have been instances of surplus lands being allotted to the persons who are not eligible according to the test laid above. This is, of course a defect of the procedure and not of the theory of ceiling rules.

The second factor which has a bearing on the success of the ceiling legislation is the problem of making available to the small poor cultivators necessary capital at a low rate of interest for cultivating their lands. This is a gigantic problem and unless this problem is solved the entire project of vesting and distribution would become a fruitless exercise. There have been cases where the poor allottees had to sell out their lands turning themselves into landless labourers once again. There have been also cases where the poor landless allottees put them in the position of share-croppers by accepting loans at huge rate with terms and conditions adverse to their interest.

The attention of all social workers and of the Government have been focused on this problem of late and efforts are being made by the Government to see that the Nationalised Banks open their branches in the rural areas and grant liberal loans to the small farmers.

If the surplus lands could be correctly located and distributed to the proper persons and if credit facilities are easily made available to such persons and if the share-croppers are given all the protection and if the rights granted to them under this statute are not allowed to remain merely ineffective printed phrases, the land reforms measures which practically stands on the sole pillar of ceiling provisions will be a success. In a way this will increase the purchasing capacity of the individuals and will give a philip to the industries producing consumer goods.

It must be remembered that the land reforms by itself will not solve the problem of rural poverty. The quantity of land available for agriculture is fixed by nature. Intensive cultivation through improved methods also has its limits. The population is growing fast. The land reforms measures, should therefore, be complemented with industrial growth by setting up industries in the rural areas and by fostering the cottage industries.

"THE EFFECTS OF LAND REFORMS IN A VILLAGE IN THE SUNDARBANS"  
BY SHRI H. GHOSH, I.A.S.

( a synopsis of the paper prepared in Jan.1972 ).

The village chosen for the study is Akshoynagar in P.S. Kakdwip. Its total population, according to 1971 Census, was 3501. The village is within a mile from Kakdwip town and is connected with it by a metalled road. The headquarters of the Block Development Office and the Land Reforms Circle Office and the Co-Operative Credit Society are located in the village. It is therefore, close to a urban centre but nonetheless it is a typical Sundarban village.

It is possible to find out a pattern of size group of ownership holdings as it was just before the date of vesting under the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act and also after the vestings were effected in accordance with the ceiling provisions of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act. Table I given below shows the position as it obtained before the date of vesting.

T A B L E - I.

Size group of ownership holdings in acres.	No. of Holdings.	Percentage of the total No. of holding.	Area owned in acres.	Percentage of the total raiyati area.
Below	14,43	76.42	557.24	20.24
1.00 - 2.50	2,73	14.44	412.00	20.92
2.51 - 5.00	1.10	5.02	368.71	18.70
5.01 - 7.50	37	1.94	233.06	11.81
7.51 -10.00	7	0.34	68.75	3.47
10.01-15.00	13	0.67	173.14	0.77
15.01-20.00	3	0.16	52.05	2.62
20.01-25.00	1	0.05	23.23	1.10
Above 25	3	0.16	83.80	4.29
<b>TOTAL :</b>	<b>18,90</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1972.78</b>	<b>100</b>

2. Table II shows the effect of the vestings made under the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act.

T A B L E - II.

Size group of ownership holding (in acres)	No. of Holdings.	Percentage of the total no. of holdings.	Area owned in acres.	Percentage of the total raiyati area.
Below 1	1442	72.02	556.53	31.51
1.00 - 2.50	273	14.54	412.80	23.38
2.51 - 5.00	106	5.65	338.81	19.18
5.01 - 7.50	26	1.92	203.56	11.53
7.51 - 10.00	4	0.22	34.53	1.96
10.01 - 15.00	12	0.64	144.00	8.15
15.01 - 20.00	3	0.16	49.60	2.81
20.01 - 25.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
Above 25	1*	0.05	26.22	1.48
<hr/>				
TOTAL :	1877	100.00	1766.04	100.00

✓ " It may be surprising to find a land holding measuring more than 25 acres after the imposition of ceiling. A Civil Rule issued by the High Court has stayed the vesting of lands here ✓ .

3. The vestings naturally affected only persons holding areas above the limits prescribed under W.B.E.A. Act and left others untouched may be noted that Table II shows the position as if the lands vested had not been distributed. This is so because the R.O.Rs prepared at the time could not reflect the distribution of the vested lands. A comparison between ~~Table I~~ Table I and II will show the impact of the W.B.E.A. Act and distribution of the lands in the village. It will be found that 0.37 percent of the land-owners of the village hold lands in excess of 15 acres and accounted for 8-09 percent of the total agricultural lands in the village prior to the implementation of the W.B.E.A. Act. If we ignore the lands held by a big land-owner who obtained a Civil Rule against the

the vestings of his lands, the position after the date of vesting is that 0.16 percent of the land owners held land over 15 acres and accounted for 2.81 percent of raiyati lands.

3.1. The average land holding of owners having lands in excess of 15 acres declined from 22.73 acres to 16.53 acres on implementation of the W.B.E.A. Act. The differential between average land holding among the owners of lands below 25 acres and those of lands above 15 acres has similarly declined from 1 : 40 to 1 : 29.

4. A survey of the distribution of the vested lands was made to find out the impact of the land reforms measures and the pattern of the land holdings in the village. It may be noted here that while about 7% of the agricultural lands of the State vested in consequence of the W.B.E.A. Act, the area of the lands vested in this village is 10% of the total agricultural lands of the village. It may be claimed therefore that the implementation of the W.B.E.A. Act has been more or less successful in the village against the background of the general performance in the State as a whole.

4.1. To ascertain the position resulting from the distribution of vested lands another survey was made by taking into account the mutation done in the tenants' ledgers by the J.L.R.Os and the new tenants or licencees created on the vested lands. There was, at the time, a sizeable back-log of mutation cases. To that extent therefore, the position ascertained and given in the Table below, therefore, may be somewhat different from the real position.

Table ....

Size group of ownership holdings in acres.	No. of holdings.	Percentage of the total No. of holdings.	Area owned in acres.	Percentage of the total raiyati area.
Below 1	1520	77.00	580.40	32.86
1.01 - 2.50	285	14.50	429.77	24.35
2.51 - 5.00	116	5.82	367.06	20.78
5.01 - 7.50	33	1.63	193.11	10.93
7.51 - 10.00	6	34.00	52.25	2.95
10.01 - 15.00	7	46.00	83.25	4.71
15.01 - 20.00	2	0.11	33.98	1.92
20.01 - 25.00	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
Above 25	1	0.06	26.22	1.50
<b>TOTAL :</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1766.04</b>	<b>100</b>

5. It is seen that after 15 years from the date of vesting the holdings below 1.00 acre have increased in number of 77 and have also gained in area while a certain number of these holdings will jump to a higher acreage group if lands outside the village comprised in the holding are taken into account. There is sufficient indication that the position of genuine small holders has not deteriorated during the period.

5.1. On the other side of the scale it is found that the holdings groups above 10 acres have decreased both in number and in area. It is possible that some medium or big landholders apprehending further reduction of ceilings acquired lands in benami or transferred their lands to benamdar.

5.2. The Government acquired 234.17 acres of land in Akshoynagar. 206.74 acres being agricultural and the remainder non-agricultural. It was reported by the J.L.R.O. that at the time of survey the State had taken possession of 77.40 acres of agricultural lands and 91.34 acres of non-agricultural lands.

The High Court restrained the State from taking possession of 51.51 acres of agricultural lands and 5.33 acres of non-agricultural lands. At the time of the survey 75.03 acres of agricultural lands had been licenced out to 183 persons. Only 178 licencees were available for interrogation.

5.4. The examination of these persons revealed that landless agricultural labourers and landless share-croppers constituted nearly half of the total licencees. The remaining licencees owned lands upto 2 acres. It is clear that as a result of the distribution of lands as many as 64 erstwhile share-croppers had severed their ties with the landlords and were now cultivating lands on their own.

5.5. It was found that a small percentage of licencees had other non-agricultural pursuits as small traders, petty service holders, carpenters, potters and two of them were Primary School Teachers. The average area of lands allotted to the licencees work out to 0.42 acres. The majority however, received lands measuring less than 0.33 acres, the minimum area fixed by the Board of Revenue, West Bengal.

6. Certain other factors bearing upon the condition of the licencees and the prospects of their turning out as independent farmers were revealed from the survey. It was found that the Government had not so far drawn up any scheme to finance the cultivation of the vested lands by the licencees who naturally had no capital. Only a few licencees who held raiyati lands succeeded in getting loans from the Government offering their raiyati lands as security. These loans accounted for less than 3% of the total borrowings of the licencees. Coverage of the Co-Operative Credit Society is not also encouraging. The Credit Societies are dominated by prosperous farmers who have a prejudice against these small newly created raiyats. The money lenders provide 90% of the total borrowings of the licencees, giving loans both in cash and in kind. The rate of interest varies from 25% to 40% per annum. Borrowings are made not only for cultivation but also for meeting the cost of basic necessities of life.

7. It became apparent that the land reforms measures cannot be successful through land reforms Act only. The success depends on the availability of easy credit and assimilation of improved technique of cultivation. Given these pre-conditions the distribution of lands will serve as a catalyst for important social and economic changes in the countryside. Otherwise the same forces which undercut the peasant proprietorship in the past will again throw them inexorably down the path of pauperisation and landlessness.

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PROBLEMS OF SHARE CROPPERS IN WEST BENGAL

- M. M. K. SARDANA.

The system of cultivation known as share cropping has been prevalent in our country since the time of the Aryans and it has persisted till to-day traversing through the different successive sets of administration in the long course of history.

2. Normally, the King was entitled to one-fourth of the produce of land. The landlord, in his turn, used to get half of the produce from the share cropper. Out of the half-share received by the landlord, he used to pass on to the King the latter's share. Thus, the ratio in which the produce used to be shared by the king, the landlord and the share cropper was  $\frac{1}{4} : \frac{1}{4} : \frac{1}{4}$ . The actual cultivator of land was, therefore, the biggest beneficiary in respect of the parcel of land cultivated by him.

3. However, the tide turned when, under the system introduced by Todar Mal, the Mughals encouraged the collection of the King's share in cash. The amount of revenue to be paid to the paramount power was subsequently fixed in perpetuity. The price of crops kept on increasing and consequently the money value of the share of the crop delivered by the share cropper to his landlord kept on mounting. At present, in West Bengal the rent per acre of good class of agricultural land is Rs.9.00. The average yield of such land is 30 maunds of paddy per acre and the price of one maund of paddy is roughly Rs.40.00. Thus, the money value of half the produce (paddy) of one acre of land given by the share cropper to the owner of the land is roughly Rs.600.00, whereas, the owner of the land pays a rent of Rs.1.00 only for the same land to the Govt.

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It should be borne in mind that the rising costs of inputs fully neutralise the seeming benefit or profit of the share cropper but the owners of the land reaps the rich harvest without investing anything for it.

4. Thus, the system introduced by the Mughals had a built-in damaging potential for the share croppers and the Govt. alike though, perhaps, unintended and unforeseen at the time of its introduction. However, the system has fossilized over the years. The system of Barga cultivation as share cropping is known in West Bengal, has continued.

5. The share croppers ( Bargadars ) enjoyed practically no guarantees under the various statutes before the passing of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955. The provisions for the Bargadars in the said Act are mainly these :

- (i) The right of a Bargadar to cultivate a land has been made hereditary.
- (ii) Provision has been made fixing the proportion in which the produce of the land is to be divided between the Bargadar and the owner of the land, as follows :-
  - (a) 50 : 50 in cases in which plough, Cattle, manure and seeds are supplied by the owner of the land ;
  - (b) 75 : 25 in all other cases.
- (iii) Prohibition of termination of Barga cultivation except on specified approved grounds and on orders of competent authority.
- (iv) Offence of termination of Barga cultivation in contravention of the provisions of the Act has been made a cognisable offence, punishable with fine and imprisonment.

(v) A receipt is to be given by the owner of the land to the Bargadar for the share of the produce received by the former.

6. On a plain reading, the above provisions of the Act appear to be very exhaustive and, indeed, they are. But the rights, guarantees and protections enshrined in these provisions founder on the rock of the legal system and procedure through which their enforcement has to be made. For, our entire legal system is based on the Anglo Saxon system of Jurisprudence which requires everything to be proved in a court of law on the principle of natural justice. Thus, if the owner of the land terminates illegally and at his will, the cultivation of his land by the Bargadar, then, it has to be proved in a court of law by the aggrieved party being the Bargadar that -

- (i) he was a Bargadar in respect of the land in question, and,
- (ii) his cultivation has been terminated in contravention of the provisions of the Act.

This is something which the Bargadar can hardly be expected to be able to do. The owner of the land will simply tire him out into surrender and submission. It has been shown by B. K. Sarkar through his extensive cases studies in the district of Bankura that in a legal battle with the Jotedar, the Bargadar stands no chance of success as the fight is as between a giant and a toddler. Unless the Bargadar can be made economically stronger, if not independent, the legal props, such as these, however exhaustive, can only mean to him empty sound and fury signifying nothing.

7. In any scheme that may be devised for helping the Bargadars, the first pre-requisite is to identify the Bargadars, that is, to bring their names on the record-of-rights. It is a matter of practical experience with the working in the field that it is a Herculean task to record the names of the Bargadars. Because of their poverty, indebtedness and economic dependance on Jotedars and fear of official machineries, the Bargadars fight shy of getting their names recorded. They ~~waddo~~ not want to displease and incur the wrath of the Jotedars on whom they depend for their very sustenance and they do not also trust the migratory officer for giving them protection.

8. The will or urge among the Bargadars to unite for securing and protecting their rights is hopelessly lacking. Firstly, they are spread over vast areas and, secondly, the political parties, who can organise and lead them, have failed in or refrained from playing their proper role in this context in right earnest. There are certain restraining factors in the situation. Village politics is even now dominated by the affluent classes and the Jotedar who own the major portion of agricultural lands. Thus, what is needed, if the benefits and guarantees provided for the Bargadars in the Act are to fructify in their lives, is that they are to be made economically independent and organisationally united and strong.

9. Over the last few years there has been positive new, bold and radical thinking in the direction of extending institutional finance to the marginal farmers including the Bargadars. Some of the nationalised Commercial Banks have set aside traditional principles of banking and entered the field of agricultural finance with definite programmes and lines of action and started giving small loans to the Bargadars among others. Uptil now, they have only touched

touched the fringe of the problem. But I want to utter a word of caution, as elaborately dealt with in my earlier paper "Bank Financing of Share Croppers", that the policy of giving Bank finance to the Bargadars should not be confined to meeting their needs for agricultural operations only. The Banks should cater to their other needs also by giving them consumption loans and loans for social purposes, if their dependence on the Jotedars and village Mahajans is to be ended. The Bank officials should approach the Bargadars and not the other way round-Half-hearted loan policies would benefit again the Jotedars and the Mahajans only at the cost of the Banks, tarnishing, in the process, the Bargadars as bad risks. Once the economic hold of the Jotedars on the Bargadars is demonstrably shaken, the neighbouring Bargadars would fall in line and take the path leading to the Banks and swell the ranks of their farmer clientels.

10. In the long run, Bank financing of Bargadars, if successful, is going to stabilise the relationship between the Bargadar and the Jotedar and do nothing more for the tiller. The results of improved cultivation through Bank loans will help increase the share and profit of the absentee Jotedar all the more. But the ~~extra~~ stabilisation of the said relationship is, nevertheless, desirable, if not in itself, as an intermediate stage towards further development.

11. A very anomalous and disturbing factor working against the Bargadar in the matter of recording his name as such is that the Jotedar can arrange cultivation of his lands by hired labour, such cultivation being recognised by the Act as one form of personal cultivation. Not many of the big Jotedars take recourse to this form of cultivation but, nevertheless, they take this ~~plea~~. As things stand

at present, the onus is always on the Bargadar to prove that he is a Bargadar. If it is not proved, then, the presumption is that the land is under the personal cultivation of its owner. The Act should be amended providing that a raiyat owning more than five acres of land, on which there is no recorded Bargadar, will have to prove that the land is under his personal cultivation. For this purpose, provision should be made in the Act requiring such raiyats to file some returns in prescribed forms. These returns should be thoroughly scrutinised in the light of wages payable to agricultural labourers at the rates prescribed by Minimum Wages laws for agricultural labour and in the light of other relevant costs and yield per acre fixed for the area by the Agricultural Department. If necessary, the return filed by such raiyat to the Commissioner of Agricultural Income Tax may be consulted. If such a scrutiny leads to the position that the raiyat is losing financially by keeping the land allegedly under his personal cultivation, the presumption should be that the raiyat is suppressing material facts regarding wages paid and/or regarding total outturn or the fact that the land is actually under

under Barga cultivation. There should be suitable penal provision in the statute for forfeiting such holdings by the Government if the presumption is confirmed by evidence.

12. A point, which is not now-a-days projected forcefully is that the share of the produce deliverable by the Bargadar to the owner of the land may be commuted into Cash payment. Such commutation is not to be made at market value of the average produce of the land but may be expressed in terms of a multiple of the cash rent paid by the owner of the land to the Govt. For example, 10 times the rent paid by the owner of the land would, in my opinion, be a fair rate of Commutation. Even then, a Bargadar cultivating one acre of land would be paying to the owner of the land Rs.90.00 as against the share of the produce worth Rs.600.00 which he delivers now to the owner. The Act should be ~~be~~ amended making provision for such commutation.

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## PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

BY J. V. R. PRASADA RAO .

" The really poor never strike. They haven't the means or the power to demonstrate". ( Nehru ).

"Fundamental reforms that will break stagnation in rural India must be sustained by 'pressure from below'. That pressure will not be extended until the masses of people feel that things are changing and that they change because people themselves are determined to change them". ( Gunnar Myrdal ).

The Planning Commission has recently become interested in finding out the reasons for certain peculiarities in the census figures relating to agricultural workers in some West Bengal districts. The census figures for 1961 and 1971 show a very sharp increase in the number of agricultural labourers in the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Malda. The percentage of increase in these districts varies from 150% in Malda to nearly 300% in Darjeeling. The State average increase ( 02% ) may appear less in comparison with these four districts, but is itself quite high in absolute terms. Such high percentages of increase cannot be explained by the general population increase or the more broad based definition of 'agricultural workers' in the 1971 census. It is interesting to note that within the same decade the number of cultivators in West Bengal has reported a fall from 44.59 lakhs to 39.55 lakhs. There are thus 02 agricultural workers for every hundred cultivators in West Bengal. An interesting coincidence is that in Maharashtra also the ratio is exactly the same according to the census figures. The reason for this skewed nature of figures is the gradual alienation of small and marginal

and marginal farmers from land, thus swelling the ranks of landless agricultural workers. What is more disturbing is that this alienation has taken place in a decade when land reforms and distribution of land to landless persons have been taken up as priority programmes. According to the Land Utilization and Land Reforms Deptt. of the Government of West Bengal, a total area of 5,89,000 acres of Govt. vested land has become available for distribution out of which an area of 4,60,000 acres has been settled on permanent raiyati status and annual licenses have been issued to 6,30,000 landless agricultural workers in West Bengal. The proportion of agricultural labourers who constitute the largest single workgroup among the various sectors of employment in West Bengal has actually registered an increase between 1961 and 1971, indicating that instead of surplus manpower being siphoned away from agriculture to the other sectors of the economy, dependence on agriculture had actually increased. The hard fact is, therefore, that Governmental efforts could not prevent a large chunk of the rural population from getting alienated from land and thus becoming further impoverished.

The conditions of life of an average agricultural worker are by now well-known from the series of surveys undertaken by official and non-official agencies in West Bengal and outside. The Labour Directorate of the Govt. of West Bengal has undertaken one such survey in 5 districts of West Bengal in 1973 and 1974. The following table gives in a nutshell the findings of the survey.<sup>1</sup>

Dist- trict.	Average family size inclu- ding earners.	Average no.of working days during the year.	Average earnings per working day per earner(Rs.)	Satutory M.W. (Rs.)	Average earnings per mem- ber of the family cal- culated on 365 days in the (72-73)	Percentage of earnings with ref.to National family cal- culated on Income of 365 days in the 687.60 (72-73)	Earnings p members of the family falling be poverty li in (%).
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
Birbhum.	6.14	160.81	2.37	5.60	0.24	12.83	80.65
Nadia.	6.02	219.23	2.58	5.60	0.45	24.15	63.71
Jalpai guri.	4.26	174.35	3.28	5.60	0.47	24.87	62.10
Malda.	5.40	161.41	2.03	5.60	0.30	16.08	75.81
24-Par- ganas.	5.88	181.19	3.10	5.60	0.38	20.42	69.35

A comparison between column 4 and 5 shows the gulf of difference that exists between the intentions of the Government and the reality. An average agricultural worker in West Bengal has got three to four dependents to support, cannot get work for more than 170 days in a year and his earnings distributed among the members of his family over a period one year amount to a mere 37 paise per day. Even for a purely biological existence, these earnings come nowhere near the basic minimum. For a major part of the year the worker and his family have to depend upon the landlord for survival.

Regarding the indebtedness of agricultural workers, the survey mentioned earlier says 'Their masters advance them paddy during the lean season under the deri system. That is to say, they have to return a bag and a half of paddy for each bag of paddy that they take on loan. They return the paddy from what they receive as wages during the harvest. As a result, during

during the harvest. As a result, during the harvest hardly any surplus comes back to the contract labour. His indebtedness in paddy together with the interest thereon of one year is carried forward to the next year and he is left with no choice but to renew his contract with the same landlord unless, of course, the landlord gets someone else at a cheaper rate. In that event he has to repay the debt in cash by working as casual labour elsewhere or the debt burden continues to grow. Some time he discharges his debt obligation by working without any wages during the off season. His grown-up children are often employed by the land owners as cow boys without remuneration. Women-folk of the family are also employed as domestic servants and that too without any wages ..... Inspite of the services of the entire family, only the interest is remitted but the principal continues and the family also continues to be in bondage to the creditor till the principal is repaid.<sup>2</sup> The principal is never repaid and is carried as an hereditary obligation. Indebtedness is thus transferred from the father to the son to the grand-son and so on. This factor coupled with abundance of labour in the rural areas depresses the level of wages to an insignificantly low level as is evident in Column.4 of the above report.

This is the life style of an agricultural worker in West Bengal. His counterparts in other States in India are no better. In a much broader perspective, there are 400 million such people concentrated in Asian countries especially India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan whose annual income per head is below Rs.50, which is defined as "absolute poverty".<sup>3</sup> Along with the landless labourers, the other groups which find a place in this definition of 'rural poor' are the small and marginal farmers, tenants and share croppers who try hard to eke out a meager living from little patches of land and who are by no means better off than the rural wage earners, and rural artisans.

Such abysmal poverty on such a large scale cannot be overcome by any piecemeal application of a series of welfare measures on behalf of various groups. For example let us take the case of two such measures (i) land reforms (ii) green revolution.

Land Reforms are readily advocated as the solution to the removal of poverty among the landless labourers. According to the figures of the L.U. & R. & L. & L.R. Deptt. a total area of 5.09 lakhs acres of Govt. vested land is available for distribution to landless, whose number is nearly 32 lakhs. The per capita availability of land does not therefore constitute an economic holding. When such a small piece of land is allotted to a landless agricultural workers without any other supporting measures, there is every likelihood of his selling out or mortgaging the land to his landlord or money lender as a part of his mounting debt. Land Reforms, while facilitating a fair distribution of ownership of land cannot by itself be the ultimate solution to the problems of landless labourers.

The advocates of green revolution feel that higher growth rate in production brings in its wake higher earnings for the wage earners. They point out to Punjab and Haryana where the agricultural worker gets a higher rate of wage which is attributed to the green revolution. Empirical studies in these areas have however shown that the growth rates of production rose much more than growth rates of real wages suggesting that the labourers received only a small share of the gains.<sup>4</sup> It has also been observed that any given increase in Irrigation and cropping intensity is likely to raise agricultural wages more in an area with a smaller proportion of rural labour force.

dependent on wage employment than in an area where vast masses of tiny peasants and the landless flood the market, and the non-agricultural sector is too small to absorb much of it.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the latter represents the actual position in a major part of our rural areas. The impact of new agricultural technology on agricultural wage rates and employment has been studied in some IADP districts and it was found out that the daily real agricultural wage rates declined over the period 1962-63 to 67-68 in many of the IADP districts.<sup>6</sup> It is, therefore, doubtful whether increased rates of production pushes the agricultural wage rates upwards. It could only lead to a higher hired labour employment., which does not produce any significant effect in the highly surplus 'rural labour market' .

It is in this context that I would like to emphasize the need to have a comprehensive overall policy of rural development where the target groups and the problems areas in which correct strategy has to be adopted are properly identified. The target groups are the rural poor classified as a) landless labourers (b) small and marginal farmers and (c) rural artisans. The common characteristics of these groups are :

- \* i) Re-current and disguised unemployment during the major part of the year .
- ii) Low wages below the subsistence level during the work period, and the consequent economic dependence on the landlords and money-lenders during the lean period leading to indebtedness.
- iii) Lack of organizational support in the form of unions etc.
- iv) Illiteracy and social backwardness.

i) The attack on the unemployment problem can be by a massive rural employment programme. These programme by making possible sustained demands for large masses of unskilled rural labour provide one of the best answers for a simultaneous solution to the problems of rural employment, income distribution, and growth. China has achieved impressive results by utilizing the surplus labour to build an extensive agricultural infrastructure. During slack seasons they have used their surplus man power in labour intensive public works programme like irrigation, canals, wells, small dams, drainage system, afforestation and soil conservation works. The FAO estimates that 25,000 million mandays of labour are being expended in China annually on these works during the slack season.

In India, the Crash Scheme for Rural Employment is the ~~xxxx~~ first effort towards a massive rural workers programme. This was followed by the Drought Prone Area Programme for generating employment in 54 chronically drought prone areas. There is still great scope to create infrastructural facilities like development of our irrigation, rural roads, school buildings, water supply health centres etc. through labour intensive methods. In all these cases there is need for better integration of these programmes into an overall strategy.

Two important conditions should however be fulfilled in these programmes to promote both equity and economic growth.

1) They should not be merely employment generating but should create fixed assets in the rural areas useful to the community.

2) Availability of essential consumer goods through and efficient public distribution system at cheapter rates should be ensured to meet the increase in their demand consequent to the rise in the incomes of the rural poor through this additional employment.

Without going into a detailed discussion about the success of these special rural works programmes in creating rural employment I would list out certain features of these programme which need corrective measures for greater effectiveness.

- 1) There is always a sudden rush of expenditure at the end of the financial year, giving a 'PWD type' appearance to these programmes. The programme operation intensity should be adjusted to meet the seasonal agricultural demands.
- 2) The target groups are not always kept in view while designing the detailed programmes. With the result that after execution of the programmes the assets created are not of particular use to the beneficiaries. There is inadequate post project maintenance arrangements.
- 3) The powers and responsibilities particularly on the financial side of the authorities at the district level should be increased to encourage initiative and drive and to allow for a certain degree of autonomy and ~~fixed~~ flexibility in achieving the national objectives.

#### LOW WAGES.

Barring the organised sector, the degree of increase in wage rates for the work force over the years since independence is practically negligible. But nowhere the increase is so insignificant as in the case of agricultural workers. The indices of real wage rates of Male Field Labour published by the Director of Economics and Statistics, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, show a declining trend after 1961-62. The index which was at 109 in 1961-62 has fallen to 90 in 66-67 and slightly increased to 96 in 71-72.

These are not equal even to the reference period 1956-57 when the index is 100. Even the statutory wage rates fixed by the Govt. under the Minimum Wages Act, are quite low compared to those for other unskilled workers in urban areas. The rates which varied from Rs.1.50 to Rs.1.87 per day for male adults in 1959 in West Bengal were revised and fixed at 3.03 to 3.08 per day in 1968. For the first time in 1974 the wage rates have been revised taking the need factor into consideration.

The notable departures from the normal pattern of fixation and revision of minimum wages are i) for the first time the concept of need based wage has been accepted and adopted for calculating the minimum rates. The poverty line as adopted by the Planning Commission has been taken as the basis for evaluating the minimum rate. The idea is that payment of the minimum rates will ensure the agricultural workers a standard of living above the poverty line. ii) Same wage rates have been adopted for men and women workers for all areas in West Bengal.

While it is conceded that in their present condition the landless agricultural workers are not in a position to avail the benefits of these statutory measures, there is a great need for increased governmental effort to effectively follow up the intentions expressed in the minimum wages notifications. The Govt. of West Bengal is trying to come to grips with the problem by evolving a suitable machinery for implementation of these measures. The Government is going to appoint one Minimum Wage Inspector for each development block with adequate supervisory officers at the higher level. The Inspectors also function as conciliation officers. An Agricultural Workers Bill is also under preparation which if enacted will confer the following benefits for the Agricultural Workers.

- 1) Security of employment, and better living conditions.
- 2) Settlement of agricultural disputes.
- 3) Provision of Welfare amenities.

For the first time an effort will be made under its provisions to maintain a register of agricultural workers at the Block level which will give an accurate idea of the degree of un-employment in the rural areas of West Bengal.

Another important measure adopted by the Govt. is the passing of the West Bengal Relief of Rural Indebtedness Ordinance 1975. This ordinance not only provides for debt relief by the prescribed authority of the Govt. on an application made by the debtor, but also imposes a ceiling interest rates whereby a simple interest @ 6 1/4% per annum is the highest rate of interest that can be charged on any such debt.

In this context I would like to quote from a report on the Agrarian Movement in Dhanbad by R.N.Maharaj and K.G. Iyer<sup>7</sup> "The rural poor, especially, the tribals are no longer indebted not that debts have been liquidated but that they have been repudiated wholesale. While it is difficult for us at this stage to give a precise quantitative assessment of loss to the money lenders we can safely say that it comes into several lakhs. According to the calculation of the Bank of India ( Lead Bank in the district ) estimate in 1972 the volume of business transacted by money lenders amounted to 40 to 50 lakhs of rupees ..... The Debt Redemption Act which annuls all debts owed by Scheduled Castes and Tribes and certain backward classes proved of great help in rallying the peasantry."

Therefore , given the organisational support, the peasants and agricultural workers can take the help of such Debt Relief measures of the Govt. to redeem themselves from this economic obligation foisted upon them by unscrupulous landlords and money lenders.

RURAL WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS :

The Dhanbad Report mentioned above attributes the remarkable success achieved by the rural poor in that area to the organisational support provided by a local political party enjoying the confidence of the tribal population. The need for effective organisational support for any effort on the part of the rural poor to derive the benefits of socialistic legislation can hardly be over-emphasized.

In India, the prominent organisations of agricultural workers and small peasants are the two All India Kisan Sabhas affiliated to the Communist Party of India and CPI(M) and the Indian National Rural Labour Federation affiliated to the INTUC. There are other smaller organisations but their influence is more or less localised to a particular area or State. But the total figure of membership of different organisations claimed and estimated will be around 3.07 million. This is slightly less than 5% of the estimated number of the poor peasantry and agricultural workers. This shows how weak is the organisation of the rural poor in India.<sup>8</sup> In West Bengal, only 12 Unions got themselves registered with Registrar of Trade Unions under the Trade Union Act, whose total membership does not exceed 1000.

There can be various obstacles which impede the growth of the rural workers organisations. The fact that the workers are geographically scattered, the high percentage of illiteracy, a passive attitude towards the existing rural structures, and in some cases, the continuing importance of the sense of belonging to traditional groups (Castes & tribes etc.) as well as financial difficulties. Where these difficulties might otherwise be overcome, the opposition of the dominant rural classes, and the unfavourable political climate sometimes succeed in preventing the creation of rural unions or in undermining their work indefinitely.<sup>9</sup> An important landmark in the history of rural workers organisations is the convention adopted at the 60th session of ILO this year urging upon the member countries to promote organisations of rural poor. The operative portion of the convention is given in Appendix I.

There is thus a greater realization of the need for rural workers organizations at the international level. At the national level also, there is no lack of political will at the policy making level. But the intentions of the political leaders at the national level are not translated into action oriented programmes at the grass roots level. The programme of going back to the villages launched by some political parties have not provided much successful. There is not much evidence of the Trade Union Wings of the different political parties who have expended and consolidated their influences in the urban areas, doing the same in the country-side. Expressing his disappointment at the stagnation in their activities, the General Secretary of the Bharatiya Khet Majdoor Union (CPI) in his report to the third conference at Tenali, Andhra Pradesh in 1974 states the main reasons for this as i) shortage of cadres , ii) lack of finance. How to build up such cadres is still an enigma for the seasoned trade union leaders of different political affiliations.

One important constraint towards building up such organizations is the stratification of our rural society according to caste and religion. It is a common feature of our rural areas that the landlords, moneylenders and other economically advanced classes usually belong to the upper castes and the share croppers, the landless agricultural workers belong to the low castes like Harijans, tribals etc. These lower caste Hindus are traditionally oppressed and segregated through practices like untouchability and are unable to organise themselves against the dominant castes. The attitude of the Government Officials and police at the lower levels of administration, is also sometimes coloured by these caste considerations as a majority of them again belong to these upper castes.

The National Labour Institute, New Delhi, has recently taken upon itself the task of organising training programmes for the rural labour leaders. The Camps which were held in 4 States till now, including West Bengal have generated great enthusiasm among the rural organisers. With greater participation from the rural poor and effective follow-up measures after the training, a nucleus of labour organisers can be created in the rural areas. But no agrarian movement can be neutral in its nature. Such efforts at training by political parties and their affiliated trade unions are likely to promote rural workers organisations to a greater extent.

#### ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES :

Barring the State of Kerala where rural literacy is 58.90% the average literacy in our rural areas is 23.60%. In Kerala recent studies have revealed that the high percentage of literacy had indeed a significant effect on the growth of rural workers organisations and the economic upliftment of the rural poor. Unfortunately, adult literacy

adult literacy programmes particularly for the rural poor do not find an important place in our education policy. Even the limited programmes which are undertaken are on the conventional education pattern, and do not impart any social education which makes the people conscious of their present condition and make them action oriented to change it for better.

As an example, we can cite the adult literacy programmes in West Bengal. The 950 adult education centres for men and women run by the Government impart an education which will make the adults simply read and write. The curriculum does not provide any scope for understanding their socio economic status, and the reasons for their poverty and unemployment. Even the functional literacy programmes' started by the Government of India in some districts in West Bengal aim at imparting certain professional skills to the agricultural workers which may be useful in their work, but do not take into consideration the need to make them aware of the reasons for their poverty and exploitation.

The epoch making experiments of Paulo Freire with the peasants of Latin America, while he was Secretary of Education and General Co-ordination of the National Plan of Adult Literacy in Brazil, threw a totally new light on the methodology of adult education. According to Freire "Learning is not a matter of memorizing and repeating given words, syllables and phrases but rather of reflecting critically on the process of reading and writing itself and on the profound significance of language". His fundamental thesis is that there is no neutral education. It is either for domestication or for freedom. Paulo Freire himself meets the criticism of the utopian nature of this pedagogy by saying that it is utopian not in the sense that it is unrealizable but in that a denunciation of a dehumanizing reality and the annunciation of a possible more human one are united in a single perspective.

The Voice of Paulo Fraire perhaps is also addressed to the millions of the rural poor in this country who are illiterate and are living in a 'culture of silence'.

BEGAR AND OTHER FORMS OF FORCED LABOUR :

Our political fathers, while drafting the Constitution thought that any form of forced labour is a slavish practice and prohibited it under Article 23 of the Constitution. The article reads "Traffic in human beings and begar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law." It has since then been taken for granted that forced labour is non-existent in India.

But the reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes speak of a different picture altogether. Since 1951, the Commissioner is regularly bringing out reports pointing out the existence of 'Begar' and other forms of forced labour in a number of States. The report for 1971-72 and 72-73 describes this in-human practice as follows :-

"The prominent feature of the system is that a man pledges his person or sometimes a member of his family against a loan. The pledger or his nominee is released only on its discharge. Until then the man himself or the member of the family is required to work for his creditor against his daily meals .... The relationship lasts for months and sometimes years, occasionally for an entire life time and not infrequently follows the male heir."

We thus find that there is a sub-stratum in our society for whom basic human rights guaranteed under the law of the land are denied. They are the poorest of the poor. According to the Commissioner this practice is still existing in States like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, M. P., Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu and U. P. But what is surprising is the reluctance of some of the State Governments to admit the existence of such practice and to adopt measures to prohibit it. Thanks to the 20 point programme announced by the Prime Minister in which "abolition of bonded labour" is included as one of items, some of these States are now coming forward with legislative measures to prohibit the practice of bonded labour. This is a clear example of the lack of political will at the regional and local levels to come to grip with the problems of rural poor.

Mere enactment of legislations prohibiting the practice will bring no relief to the bonded labour. Vigorous follow-up measures like redemption of their debts to free them from the clutches of landlords and money-lenders, severe punishment to people indulging in such practices, allotment of cultivable land, enforcement of minimum wages, should be taken to enable them to assert their rights as free citizens of the country.

The problem of mass poverty in our rural areas is thus a chronic and deep rooted one. Agricultural workers together with sharecroppers and small farmers and rural artisans account for the majority of rural poor. No piecemeal application of any one of the measures discussed above on behalf of various groups will solve the problem. The need is for an over all strategy of rural development - which should (1) guarantee productive employment to the rural poor by (a) distribution of cultivable land and provision of agricultural inputs (b) execution of massive

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(b) execution of massive rural works programmes, and (2) remove their social backwardness by (a) vigorous adult literacy programmes which should make them conscious of their existential reality and the need to change and (b) promoting rural workers organisations which for the rallying ground for the rural poor to unite and wage a struggle for economic and social justice guaranteed to them under our Constitution.

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APPENDIX - I.

RURAL WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS CONVENTION, 1975.

ARTICLE - I

This convention applies to all types of organisations of rural workers, including organisations not restricted to representative of rural workers.

ARTICLE - 2

1. For the purposes of this Convention, the term "rural workers" means any person engaged in agriculture, handicrafts or a related occupation in a rural area, whether as a wage earner or, subject to the provisions of paragraph 2 of this Article, as a self-employed person such as a tenant, sharecropper or small owner occupier.

2. This Convention applies only to those tenants, share-croppers or small owner-occupiers who derive their main income from agriculture, who work the land themselves; with the help only of their family or with the help of occasional outside labour and who do not -

- (a) permanently employ workers, or
- (b) employ a substantial number of seasonal workers ; or
- (c) have any land cultivated by sharecroppers or tenants.

ARTICLE - 3

1. All categories of rural workers, whether they are wage employed, shall have the right to establish and, subject only to the rules of the organisation concerned, to join organisations of their own choosing without previous authorisation.

2. The principles of freedom of association shall be fully respected ; rural workers' organisations shall be independent and voluntary in character and shall remain free from all interference, coercion or repression.

3. The acquisition of legal personality by organisations of rural workers shall not be made subject to conditions of such a character as to restrict the application of the provisions of the preceding paragraphs of this Article.

4. In exercising the rights provided for in this Article rural workers and their respective organisations, like other persons or organised collectivities, shall respect the law of the land.

5. The law of the land shall not be such as to impair, nor shall it be so applied as to impair, the guarantees provided for in this Article.

ARTICLE - 4.

It shall be an objective of national policy concerning rural development to facilitate the establishment and growth, on a voluntary basis, of strong and independent organisations of rural ~~workers~~ workers, without discrimination as defined in the Discrimination ( Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958, in economic and social development and in the benefits resulting therefrom.

ARTICLE - 5.

1. In order to enable organisations of rural workers to play their role in economic and social development, each Member which ratifies this Convention shall adopt and carry out a policy of active encouragement to these organisations, particularly with a view to eliminating obstacles to their establishment, their growth and the pursuit of their lawful activities, as well as such legislative and administrative discrimination against rural workers' organisations and their members as may exist.

2. Each Member which ratifies this Convention shall ensure that national laws or regulations do not, given the special circumstances of the rural sector, inhibit the establishment and growth of rural workers' organisations.

ARTICLE - 6.

Steps shall be taken to promote the widest possible understanding of the need to further the development of rural workers' organisations and of the contribution they can make to improving employment opportunities and general conditions of work and life in rural areas as well as to increasing the national income and achieving a better distribution thereof.

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## FOREWORD

Of late, stringent measures have been taken, with satisfactory results, against smugglers and tax evaders, who tended to hold the national economy at ransom. Still, there are others, operating in the countryside, ~~have~~ acquired huge wealth and money-power and have thrown the rural economy out of balance, taking advantages of loopholes of land laws and executive lapses in the past. This small but influential group of rural affluent have manifestedly tended to dominate the socio-economic life in the countryside disregarding all moral ethics and principles of social justice. Their reactionary modus-operandi and selfish designs are not only frustrating the national aspirations to build up a socialistic pattern of society but also counteracting the GOVT. endeavours in this direction.

An attempt has been made in this brochure to explore the factors leading to the growth of these reactionary forces in the countryside and also to show how the tremendous money power of the rural affluent have helped them dominate the rural masses by degrading the latter to the lowly status of economic and social dependants of the former. The phenomenal rise of rural affluent in the country-side and their all pervasive socio-economic dominance over the rural mass has been termed 'Growth of Economic Feudalism' in this brochure. One may of course call it by any other name which may sound more appropriate.

Problems and plights of different groups like share-croppers, landless cultivators etc. of the agrarian society have not been separately discussed in this brochure due to its limited scope and space. However, it may not be difficult to form one's opinion about them if one can assess the magnitude of general maladies in the socio-economic structure of the agrarian society.

Lastly, it may be mentioned here that analyses and inferences made and drawn in this brochure are based on purely personal knowledge and assessment of the past developments in the agrarian sector as viewed by the writer and as such, possibility of committing errors arising out of personal equations cannot be ruled out. Besides, it requires more collection of authentic data and intensive debate to make deeper analysis and correct evaluation of this great problem.

- P. K. DATTA

GROWTH OF ECONOMIC FEUDALISM AND LAND REFORM

TO COMBAT IT.

- PRANAB KUMAR DATTA.

FEUDALISM or Landlordism based on the relation between the superior and his vassals arising out of holding of land was a traditional feature in the agrarian system of this country till the end of the colonial rule. It had developed over centuries through the process of sub-infeudation and flourished through exploitation of men behind the plough by the more aggressive, intriguing and enterprising section of the community. The Permanent Settlement Regulation of 1793 gave a stamp of permanency to this system ushering in a new era of legalised exploitation of actual tillers by superior landlords. This, followed by parasitical growth of intermediaries, led to shameful degradation of the vast majority of agrarian society in social life as well as to the economic slavery of the latter. There is no need to dissect and analyse the revenue-oriented agrarian policy under the colonial rule, because many scholastic researches have already been made in this field of study. It may only be suggested that one of the hitherto untold motives behind giving relentless legal and executive support to this agrarian structure might be to use the latter's efficacy to absorb, through its innumerable tiers of intermediary rent receiving tenures, shocks of any present unrests. Absence of any serious peasant revolt over more than a century points to this system's utility to the colonial rulers. Multitudinous Rent Regulations and Tenancy Acts, outwardly aimed at welfare of the lower strata, in fact, opened up flood-gates of law suits suiting the evil designs of superior landlords to keep the peasantry on tenter hooks. But, this sense of encapsulated security of the colonial rulers no longer remained as firm as before in the twentieth

the twentieth century due to growing opposition to the colonial rule in this country and the spectral fear of social revolution elsewhere. So, the otherwise reluctant and passive Government had to occasionally pay some sluggish attentions to the problem, ultimate crystallisation of which resulted in appointment of the Floud Commission in 1938. But, there ended the Govt. initiative. The valuable report of the Commission including radical recommendation for putting an end to feudalism, based on scholastic analysis of the situation as revealed through actual field enquiries, remained as a show-piece in the dust covered Govt. archives. So, this country, when freed, had the misfortune to inherit feudalism in her land tenure system as a bitter legacy of the colonial past. Now, one may ask, "has free India succeeded in putting an end to this much desired feudalism in her land tenure system through two decades of land reform ? If so, has she succeeded in eliminating all future possibilities of its once again striking roots in the soil and of its flourishing in any other form or disguise ? " The matter may be examined in the perspective of later developments in West Bengal which claims to have gone ahead of other States in the matter of implementation of land reform.

### II.

The first step ~~was~~ towards land reform in West Bengal was taken in 1953 when the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act was enacted with twin major objectives : - (i) to do away with landlordism and (ii) to take away all surplus lands held above prescribed ceilings. Records-of-Rights were accordingly revised eliminating all proprietary and intermediary interests and both the Legislature and Executive, nonchalantly having been satisfied that at long last the ~~over~~weight of the feudal super-structure had been removed

from the shoulder of the groaning peasantry, remained virtually inactive with an aura of self-complacence for more than a decade, seemingly unaware that seeds of growth of a neo-feudalism might be lying in the womb of very liberal ceiling provisions of the Act itself, waiting for a favourable condition to germinate. Even the W.B. Land Reforms Act of 1955 embodying some provisions to protect some rights of bargadars and of backward classes and to distribute vested lands to landless cultivators etc. remained unattended for a decade or more as will be evident from framing of Rules on procedural matters as late as in 1964. It will be shown in subsequent paragraphs that the great stress laid on increased agricultural production along with legislative and executive lapses in land reform provided this favourable condition. The upper ceiling for agricultural land holding by an individual ( not family ) was fixed as 25 acres inspite of specific observation made by Floud Commission in 1940 that 10 acres constituted a viable economic holding in Bengal. Most of ex-zamindars and big intermediaries had the cunning foresight to guess beforehand what might be forthcoming, specially against the back-ground of Floud Commission's report and directive principles embodied in the Constitution and, as a precautionary measure they disseminated their landed properties amongst their other family members and benamdar well before enactment of the Act. So, the total quantum of land held by most of them was seldom less than the product of the number of their family members ( and or benamdar ) and the individual upper ceiling limit. Of course, the latter half of the last decade witnessed a sudden spurt of awareness and brisk activity of a field-wing of the Land Revenue Administration to detect and vest 5.5 lakhs acres more in a short span of time. But, this gigantic, but static, endeavour was practically devoid of legislative support and timely follow-up action and, as such, it could hardly restrict the malignant growth of money-power of big land owners. Most of the lands vested during the period remained in

in possession of the big ~~and~~ land owners for a long period due to inertia of inactivity of the Govt. machinery responsible for taking possession and distribution of said lands.

III.

Concentration pattern of land-holdings of individuals, as emerged after implementation of the W.B.E.A. Act, has since been determined in seven police stations of this State covering more than 1.6 lakhs of landowners by preparing ownerwise card-indices and consolidating them in alphabetical order. Care was taken to select the P.Ss. to include lands with different degrees of productivity viz., richly fertile alluvial lands in south 24-Parganas, lavishly irrigated lands in Burdwan district and less fertile and non-irrigated lands in North Bengal - so that the data collected assumed the representative character for the entire State. The results are shown below : -

TABLE - I.

Slabs in areas.	Total no. of the land-owners in the slab.	Percentage of land-owner in the slab.	Total area held by Col.(2)	Percentage of total areas.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
0.01 to 5.00	145104	90.0%	163479	44.1 %
5.01 to 10.00	9308	5.8%	61017	16.6 %
10.01 to 15.00	3424	2.1%	42141	11.3 %
15.01 to 20.00	1412	0.9%	24368	6.6 %
20.00 & above.	2063	1.2%	79447	21.4 %
	1,61,311	100.0%	3,71,252	100.0 %

✓ The above table has been prepared on the basis of the data used in the official brouchers "Peep into future." and "The effect of ceiling law on the holding size-pattern" prepared by this writer and Shri M. M. K. Sardana, I.A.S., respectively /

Now, it may be interesting to examine the income distribution-pattern that might have resulted from the above distribution-pattern of land as shown in columns (3) and (5) of the table, presuming that the latter represent the entire State-pattern with fair correctness. To do so the annual gross and net income from all agricultural products in the State require to be found out as has been done in table 2 below :

TABLE : 2

Description of crop.	Estimated annual production in metric tonnes in 1975-76	Estimated annual gross income (figures have been kept on lower side to avoid over-estimation)
Rice ( Aman, Aus, Boro high yielding variety etc.)	7.35 millions.	Rs.1000 cores(approx).
Wheat	1.20 "	Rs. 170 "
Pulses	0.35 "	Rs. 80 "
Others(including Jute, sugercane,spices,oil seeds,mulberry,vegetable etc.)	**	Rs. 250 "
		Rs.1500 "

Now, presuming that the average productivity of lands held by owners under different slabs is same and keeping in mind that lands held by most of the lower slab-groups input-output ratio is still very low due to lack of finance , the aggregate net annual income of all the groups may be estimated as not less than 60% of the gross income, or Rs.900 crores. The slabwise total net annual income may be found out by splitting up the total amount of Rs.900 crores according to the percentage of total land held by different slab-groups as shown in Col. (5) of Table-I.

TABLE : 3

Percentage of land-owners in different slab shown in Table I.	Percentage of total land held by the slab-group.	Estimated net annual income of all land owners in the each slab-group.
90.0%	44.1%	Rs.396.9 crores.
5.8%	16.6%	Rs.149.4 "
2.1%	11.3%	Rs.101.7 "
0.9%	6.6%	Rs. 59.4 "
1.2%	21.4%	Rs.192.6 "

The figures in col.(3) have been arrived at on the presumption that per-acreage net annual income is same in all the groups, which is basically incorrect. The net per-acreage annual income of landowners in the highest slab-group is surely far greater, and at least 30% more, than the average of per-acreage incomes of all the groups due to selective retention of high grade lands and almost monopolistic application of modern agricultural science and technology by the highest slab-group cannot be less than Rs.192.6 crores + 30% thereof, or Rs.250.4 crores. The figure will be higher if arrived at in another way. The official figure of total area of agricultural lands in the State is 18.4 million acres ( approx.), 21.4% of which, held by the highest slab-group, means 2.06 million acres. Now, due to reasons shown above, the per-acreage net annual income under the highest slab-group can be very modestly estimated as Rs.900/-, if not more. Hence, the aggregate net annual income of the highest slab-group from 2.06 million acres of land may be Rs.257.4 ~~crores~~ or more. Nevertheless, for the sake of avoiding over-estimation the figure may be taken to be as Rs.250 crores only.

It has been estimated that the total number of land owners in this State might be 6.5 millions approximately (although the 1971 census figure is far less). Now, 1.2% (vide highest slab-group) of 6.5 millions means 78,000 landowners. As already stated earlier, most of the ex-zaminder and big-intermediary families had more than one landowners in their respective families retaining lands up to ceiling limit. That being so, 78,000 individual landowners in the highest slab-group mean not more than 39,000 affluent families. Again, to avoid-over estimation in per-family annual income of this group the total number of families comprising 78,000 individual land-owners may be round up to 50,000 whose aggregate net annual income is Rs.250 crores. So, the average net annual income per family of this affluent class is Rs.50,000/-. The annual net income will be far more if incomes from clandestinely retained lands could be assessed. According to a study made by Sri M. M. K. Sardana 388 land owners in Kakdwip P.S. hold 102 acres each upto 1974 whose individual net income could not be less than Rs.1 lakh annually. On the other hand, average annual income per family of 90% of the land owners is well below Rs.1000/-, as will be evident from analysis of the figures shown against the '0.01 to 5.00 acres' slab in the above two tables.

The above data may be analysed & further to get more valuable informations. The annual average expenditure of each of the families in the highest slab group cannot be more than Rs.30,000. That being so, the upper limit of total annual expenditure of all these 50,000 affluent families may be, at the highest, Rs.150 crores leaving a surplus of no less than Rs.100 crores annually. The most convenient way to use this surplus money for earning maximum profit has been to advance loans to the perennially indebted poorer sections

of the agrarian society at an exorbitant rate of interest ranging from 20% to 100% per annum and also to purchase and corner the agricultural products offered as distress sale for making high profits during lean months. It may earn them annually a net additional income of at least 25% of the cumulative annual surplus. If one takes the pain of doing a little more arithmetical exercises he will discover, that six years hence the aggregate surplus of Rs.600 crores from land along with the interests/ profits earned from the same may raise the cumulative surplus to more than Rs.1400 crores.. This is by no means an over-estimation of the cumulative accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few big landowners. In reality, accumulation of surplus money will be found to be much more if one takes into consideration that lands still held clandestinely in benami. It is of course true that the gross agricultural income was not so much in the past as shown in Table-2, which is based on present production and price level, but at the same time it also true that expenditure level was also lower than in present. It also cannot be denied that the present unhappy situation has not developed overnight. The Reserve Bank of India had to admit as back as in 1971 that only 20% of the land-owners enjoyed more than 60% of the rural wealth. This monopolisation of agricultural income and consequent high stratification in agrarian socio-economic power-structure have provided no less an effective tool of exploitation than sub-infeudation and landlordism during hey days of feudalism under the colonial rule provided.

IV

All the vile characteristics of landlordism of the past may be noticed in the socio-economic power manifestations of the rural affluent, derived from excessive money power and a keen observer may not fail to notice the revival of feudalism in the countryside in a new form viz., ECONOMIC FEUDALISM. Its cancerous growth has even tended to disturb the security of land tenures also, though apparently controlled by the State. Tenures of small farmers have been often imperilled due to their perennial indebtedness to the big landowners aggravated by sky-rocketting interests. Because of its rapidly growing profit earning qualities, many big landowners have tended to acquire more and more lands in favour of their family members and in benami by forcing the helpless debtor-cultivators to surrender their lands to the former through legal harassments and financial strangulation. Besides, lands of small farmers have been often purchased by them by offering tempting prices, the allurement of which could hardly be overcome by the latter, specially during social festivals. All this has been possible because there was no legal bar to acquisition of lands in the name of individuals within individual ceiling limit up to 0.8.69. Their craze for acquiring more lands have thus turned many small farmers into agricultural labourer. The sharp rise in the number of landless cultivators during the last decade in some districts (e.g. 256 % and 161 % in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar), abnormally disproportionate to the population growth, is indicative of steady degradation of small farmers to the lowly status of agricultural labourer. The big landowners, thus having grown in stature, out of all proportions, by squeezing out the small farmers and marginal cultivators, have tended to infiltrate in and influence politics also. Their corrupt influence has in some cases turned the local bodies like Panchayets etc.,

as forum of exhibition of their socio-economic dominance over the rural people and as a result these local bodies have ceased to draw public confidence in them. It may be an interesting theme for research to examine if the money power and politico-social aims of the affluent class contributed also to the growth of some militant organisations - outwardly religious in character but suspectedly not so, - political connections of which are becoming subject of increasing concern. The fundamental and only difference between feudalism under the colonial rule and economic feudalism as noted above lies not in the socio-economic evils precipitated by them but in the changed media in which they grew under changed circumstances. While in the former case exploitation was carried out through sub-infeudation in the land tenure system, in the latter case the same has been done with undiminished magnitude through high stratification of economic power - structure in the agrarian society.

V \*

There was ideologically nothing wrong in the concept of Green revolution. In fact, when the scope of horizontal expansion of arable land has already been exhausted, nothing but its vertical expansion through intensive application of modern agricultural science and technology can salvage the fast growing population of a co-unity from ravages of famine. Only the lack of imagination as to how to spread it in countryside and adoption of seemingly wrong strategy made it appear grey to the poorer section of the agrarian society. Obsessed with the fear of perennial shortage of food, maximum stress was laid on the economic aspect only of the Green Revolution i.e., increased per-acreage production, overlooking the necessity of taking precautionary measures to check monopolisation of its fruits. It was like providing

nourishing foods to a chronically ailing body before having corrected the perniciously diseased internal system thereof, which is normally responsible for uniform body-metabolism and growth. Augmentation of per-acreage output required capital investments of large amounts on items like quality seeds, fertiliser, modern implements, irrigation facilities etc., which were beyond the means of small and marginal cultivators. It is true that many of those items were supplied by the Govt. at subsidised rates and through specific channels of distribution. But, it was not difficult for the moneyed landowners to misappropriate the lion's share of the same by hook or crook, taking advantage of the prevailing wide gap between supply and demand. The resultant per-acreage higher outputs on their lands sky-rocketted the profits derived by them adding more and more to their money-power which paved the way for the growth of economic feudalism, in the manner shown in previous paragraphs. This could not have happened had land reform been synchronized with green revolution.

A section of intelligentia, seemingly hypnotised by the glare of success of the Green Revolution in certain pockets (usually strongholds of big land-owners), tried to propagate the idea, often expressed in a section of Press also, that emphasis on the principle of equity in landholding might jeopardise the interests of increased production arguing that small holdings were not suitable for practical application of modern agricultural techniques. They were quite unaware of the fact that large holdings in this region were nothing but conglomeration in paper of many small parcels of land scattered over different villages and often over different districts, though held by the same person or persons. The important lesson for them to be had from the prevailing wide disparities in agrarian socio-economic

power-structure and consequent growth of economic feudalism is that inseparable inter-relationships among "economic", "social" and "political" problems should always be given due weight in any development activities specially in a country which has promised in its Constitution to secure social, economic and political justice to all its citizens and which aspires to build a socialistic pattern of society. Green revolution, devoid of social justice, has not only aggravated social inequalities but has partly failed in attaining economic objective also i.e., increased food production, because of its confinement within the narrow limits of rural affluent only. A small question may be asked in this regard as to how one can expect maximum benefits from the Green Revolution if rights of two millions of share-croppers of the State are not protected and they are not given loans and inputs very liberally and thereby perpetuating primitive cultivation of about 15% of the total arable land of the State. As already shown, earlier roots of present maladies in the agrarian society primarily lay in high concentration of lands in the hands of a few powerful affluent families and not in the Green Revolution, which of course aggravated the maladies by tremendously increasing the capital value of the lands possessed by those families. The Green Revolution could have ~~spx~~ spread further had the money-power of the affluent landowners been curbed in time by taking away the surplus lands held by them over and above their optimum requirements for redistribution amongst the landless cultivators and had the small and marginal cultivators been freed from their economic bondage through liberal grant of loans from Govt. sponsored financial institutions. Here lies the importance of LAND REFORM. Unfortunately, in past decades Land Revenue Deptt. was given a secondary or very minor role to play in shaping the

socio-economic structure of the agrarian society, compared to that given to other Deptts., quite unaware of the consequences that might follow. Indeed, a few preventive measures, if firmly taken, would have sufficed had those measures been taken immediately after implementation of the W.B.E.A. Act. But, the disease i.e., growth of economic feudalism, has advanced far and as such, both curative and preventive measures of LAND REFORM are to be taken immediately to combat the disease and to prevent its recurrence in future.

The crying need of the hour is hence, to make amends of the past mistakes. In words of ( Late ) Prof. W. Ladjenisky, "no Govt. can accept the existing situation everly long even if it be defended on the ground that in certain circumstances this is the price of punishment an early stage of economic growth exacts". In West Bengal however ceilings were imposed on landholdings on the basis of number of family members in 1971 and rights of bargadars were also legally protected through amendments of the relevant Act. But, no tangible results were achieved during the last four years, mostly due to inexperience, and inadequacy of the official machinery which was entrusted to implement the new ceiling laws. Besides, Govt. officers with a qualifying phrase of 'land reform', probably in a dilemma of shifting priorities paid more attention to routine works of revenue collection and allied matters than to maintenance of records up-to-date, recording of share-croppers' and implementation of family ceiling laws. Recently, maximum stress has been laid on speedy implementation of new ceiling laws, up-to-dating of record-of-rights, recording of share croppers and distribution of vested lands amongst the landless. Some steps have also already been taken to reduce rural indebtedness by putting a moratorium on repayment of loans and also by establishing rural banks for giving financial supports to small and marginal cultivators. In other States also identical measures are reportedly being taken. This gigantic problem cannot be tackled by any particular wing of the Govt.

Land Reform will have to be inseparably integrated and synchronised with all developmental activities in the agrarian sector. Other Deptts. like Agriculture, Co-operative etc. along with Govt. sponsored financial institutions, will have to lend support to ensure that small and marginal cultivators do not once again ~~xx~~ relapse into indebtedness which may be taken advantage of by the rural affluent. Better results may be if personnel experienced in implementation of land reform measures with sound knowledge about record-of-rights are drafted in the financial institutions, from base to apex, responsible for financing the poorer section of the agrarian society. Because, in that case confusion over eligibility of getting financial loans or assistance may be avoided. But, the more important points are that the Legislature will have to unceasingly remain alert about the necessity of new enactments or amendments of law suiting the need of the agrarian society from time to time and, the Executive will have to shake off its proverbial tendency to maintain status-quo. The process must be a continuous one because, if inertness and self complacency grip the Govt. machineries as soon as the present enthusiasm subsides, all hopes for a permanent solution of the problem will also vanish. The air in countryside is now charged with new hopes generated in the minds of the poorer section, whose only aspiration is to get a fair deal and social dignity due to them everly long.

It will be interesting to witness if the big - landowners, reading the writings on the wall, show a greater sense of responsibility and restraint this time. If the current endeavours in peaceful implementation of land reform fail, serious consequences may follow and the money power of big landowners may no more insulate them from the explosion of wrath of the deprived and downtrodden class in the agrarian society. It is, of course, a wishful thinking that good sense will return to the big-land owners overnight. So, the present need is to make an all out effort to implement land reform within the framework of Constitutional laws in order to peacefully do away with economic feudalism and to maintain constant vigilance to sustain the results thereof. The recent stress laid on reorientation of policy and action in land reform is a silver lining on the horizon and may be considered as a good start in the direction noted above. All hopes are now pinned on the success of this new endeavour.

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CARRYING IMPROVED AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY  
TO SMALL FARMERS.

SHRI P. V. SHENOI.

The excessively skewed distribution of land holdings in India has been well recognised. For the country as a whole, 34.5% of households have holdings up to 1 hectare totalling up to only 6.8% of the total cultivable area. On the other hand, 70% of the cultivable area is in the hands of 28.4% of households in the shape of holdings of 3 hectares and above. In West Bengal particularly, nearly half the households have either no land or have land up to 1 hectare. The economy of West Bengal can be strengthened only if these rural households can make a place for themselves in the Sun. Vigorous land reforms and successive reduction in the ceiling of land holdings are bound to create more and more holdings of smaller size. Many of them might indeed belong to big farmers evading the ceiling laws. But quite a few of them will belong to small farmers or landless farmers who got a small parcel of land from the State. Thus, a major issue for agricultural development in West Bengal will be the effectiveness with which new technology of high-yielding varieties of crops, animals and fish can be carried to these small operators.

PRODUCTIVITY AND SIZE OF HOLDINGS.

There has been an apprehension for a long time, fortunately misplaced, that high agricultural productivity could be ensured only in big-sized holdings. The

The available farm management data shows that enlargement of farm size in densely settled areas ( like most of India's farm land ) is not an absolute pre-condition for increasing per hectare productivity. Indeed, such productivity is found to diminish with size over a considerable range. Productivity has gone up in Japan & Taiwan many-fold without any significant enlargement of farm size. What is the reason ? Important elements of technology of high-yielding crops are neutral to size ; and even when some are not, the rewards of size can still be reaped. Thus, technological elements, which are relevant in the immediate future as well as economically feasible, like improved seed varieties, better water management, fertiliser and pesticides -

- yield equal benefits on small farms as well. On the other hand, mechanisation of some operations, like timely ploughing and irrigation, may be essential for multiple cropping ; but this can be secured through Co-operatives or other Public agencies - or on rentals from neighbouring farmers - by small farm operators also. Thus, it is possible to bring the fruits of new agricultural technology to the small operator.

While , physically, there is no limitation for the adoption of high-yielding technology by the small operator, in effect, there are many practical constraints. In the first place , most small farmers have cultural and economic constraints which come in the way of adoption of innovations. For example, the extension machinery may not be quite in tune with his requirements and he may not have much rapport with it. Secondly, the new technology requires considerable resources which he does not have ; he is often not considered credit-worthy by

by the financial institutions. This paper will attempt to highlight these two areas.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS TO ADOPT INNOVATIONS.

It will be found that most small farmers come from uneducated homes which have not been exposed to new ideas ; they find a lot of security in repeating the age-old practices. The process of adoption of innovations is indeed complex and is marked by four psychological stages : awareness , interest , evaluation and trial. The extension organisation normally resorts to five techniques to reach improved methods of cultivation to farmers e.g., field demonstrations, formal training, farmers' organisation, mass media ( written and audio-visual) and direct contacts through tours, songs, drama and puppet shows. A small farm operator, who may be much of the time a farm labourer, is found often to suffer from inhibitions to approach the extension machinery or even to listen & respond to it. He is mostly illiterate and so outside the ambit of leaflets, circular letters and newspapers. The field demonstrations are held mostly on the farms of well-to-do farmers and he tends to discount the spectacular results on such demonstration field. He is slow to follow what is given to him ; and often he is not included in the farmers' groups for formal training. Many farm organisations do not pay much heed to his requirements because he has little influence. It is natural that an extension worker, who is responsible for showing spectacular increase in production, pays more attention to the big farmers since that would achieve for him maximum production per unit of effort.

RESPONSE TO INCENTIVES :

It is also a fact that the small operator has too narrow an economic base to do much of experimenting. One mistake and he will have to go hungry. If a prospect of 25% additional output will move a farmer of fair-sized holding to adopt the recommendation, it may require as much as a hundred per cent increase in output to tempt the small operator to risk an experiment. Hence, the recommendation to the small operator may have to be slightly different from others ; those elements in the new technology which can give very substantial yield increases with minimal investment, should be put across to the small operator in the initial stage. In this context, the minikit programme which gives a small kit of inputs for experimentation on a very small area is a very praiseworthy innovation.

SPECIAL STRATEGY IN EXTENSION :

From the above, it follows that the extension agency has to plan a special psychological strategy to reach the small operator and make him respond to the extension-teaching. The field demonstration may have to be laid on the farm of a small operator. The techniques presented may have to be the simplest with little possibility of damage if it is not fully carried out ; it should also yield a very substantial return to tempt him to experiment. The extension agent should have a special empathy with the small operator. The training programme must be as near to his farm and home as

as possible since he has to work there most of the time. It must be relevant and specific to his needs and resources. In particular, it should be tuned to the local crops, animals and available to local conditions like inadequate or mal-distributed rainfall, eroded soil etc. It must respect the fact that the small farmer has generally abundant native wisdom. The above is quite a hard order for the extension agency. Past record shows how difficult task it is to get responses and acceptance from the small operator. Missionary zeal and dedication, transcending the normal attitudes of a Government official, are called for. How can we build such an extension agency ? There seems to be no other way of getting round to it .

SUPPLY OF CREDIT & INPUTS :

As stated above, the adoption of new technology requires costly inputs like improved seed, fertiliser & pesticides. Even the price of water whether from neighbours or from the State is going to be quite high. The small operator does not have the resources to pay for this and has to turn to the money-lender or from institutions. Considering the high cost of credit from the money-lenders, it is highly doubtful whether the small operator will ever approach a money-lender for improved cultivation. Nor is it desirable that he should do so.

The obvious corollary then is that the financial institutions should come forward to help the small operator. The Cooperatives are required to pay special attention to the needs of the small operator and to lend to him without even a charge on his land to the extent of Rs.750, on the basis of bonds given by the two other

two other farmers. The security requirements of Land Development Banks have been liberalised to permit a loan for a shallow tubewell for even a two-acre farmer. In actual practice, Managing Committees of some Cooperative Societies do not fully implement this, out of a fear that they may not be able to realise the loan.

The art of using credit for production purposes is an acquired art ; it is not inborn. It requires considerable grit and discipline for a person who lives on the brink of subsistence, to take a part of the credit in inputs and actually to use it on his crop, without , say, reselling those inputs to get cash for consumption. Not many studies are available about the behaviour of small operators in the productive use of credit. But an Expert Committee of Reserve Bank of India could hold, on the basis of evidence before them, that there was no higher level of default amongst smaller farmers than amongst bigger farmers.

According to them, the repayment performance was the highest in those Cooperative Societies where there was an efficient management to recover loans. Unfortunately, many of the Societies do not have even a full-time Manager to attend to this task of recovery of loans, because income earned by the Society is not large enough to employ a full-time Manager. The whole of the cooperative credit system is being reorganised to amalgamate non-viable societies with potentially viable units which can employ full-time Manager. The commercial banks and the cooperative banks have only recently begun to make a concerted effort to understand the needs of the small operator and to give production loans to him.

SPECIAL AGENCIES FOR SMALL OPERATORS :

The country was rudely shaken up by the dramatic conclusion of the Dandekar Rath study of poverty in India which showed the appalling situation of mal-nutrition and privation suffered by small operators and landless labourers. The consequence was the initiation of special types of organisations which led a selective attack on rural poverty, e.g. Small Farmers' Development Agency for small operators with 1 to 3 hectares of land and Agency for Marginal Farmers & Agricultural Labour for those with less than 1 hectare of land. The central purpose of these agencies is to provide credit, technology, marketing and input services to improve the viability of the small operators of different sizes. These agencies themselves did not have any extensive field organisation, but utilised the existing organisation of the Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Cooperation and other Departments for achieving their purpose. There is reason to believe that these agencies have given their utmost to bring the desired benefits to the small operators. We do not have enough information to make a proper assessment of their impact. The evidence available so far shows that in some pockets of districts they indeed have done very well. Nevertheless, it can be said that there are not many districts where any widespread impact has been made on the viability of the small operators, due to the enormity of the task and the psychological and cultural inhibitions described earlier.

The National Commission on Agriculture on a thorough study of the subject found that a much more concerted attack was required to achieve any tangible results. They recommended establishment of a new type of integrated society called "Farmers' Service Society" which would combine all the services under one roof i.e., technology, inputs, credit and marketing. They called for quite a large complement of staff for this organisation. The Society was to be managed by a Committee in which at least two-thirds should be from amongst small operators. The Society would be adopted by a competent bank which would appoint a Managing Director at its own expense. The Reserve Bank of India also agreed to give substantial loans to the State Government for contributing a share capital of the Society. Five such Societies have been started in West Bengal at Bagmundi in Purulia, Saltora in Bankura, Singur & Khanakul in Hooghly and Bansihari in West Dinajpore. These have been functioning for about a year now and it is too early to judge their performance. The performance of Bagmundi Society in Purulia seems to be very heartening, since the Society has been able to win the confidence of the small operators and initiate various measures to reach viability.

The quest for a satisfactory solution to meet the credit and other requirements of the small operator is still continuing. On the 2nd of October, a new type of bank - Rural Regional Bank has been opened in Malda to serve the needs of the small operators in Agriculture as well as in other occupations in Malda, West Dinajpore and Murshidabad districts. Its style of functioning is just being evolved.

## CONCLUSION

Whatever be the kind of organisation, the basic pre-condition for successful services to the small operator is very careful selection and training of the staff which has missionary zeal and dedication and who can meet the small operator at his own level.

The will to develop should permeate their thinking.

Whether carrying technology or inputs to the small operator, this is the indispensable pre-condition and without it no form of organisation can succeed and this takes the longest time to build. It is a plant of slow growth, but it can wither away very quickly.

When all is said and done, we come back to that same basic requirement - leadership and indomitable will to succeed. Are we doing enough to build such a corps of people ?

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